Turning my Bayan

Dagdag sa VAT
Kailangan nga ba?
TELECAMCHASING MAN!
CELLPHONE MAN (HUGGY Text 2919 now!)

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PHILIPPINE DAILY
INQUIRER
BALANCED NEWS, FEARLESS V

Wednesday, March 2, 2005 ■ 36 pages / vol. 28 / no. 64

Pray for Pope, don't speculate on successor, Catholics told

By Yolanda Batella-Pomeroy
PN Northern Luzon Bureau

SAGUIPA CITY—Moments ago, Archbishop Orlito Cruz asked Catholics yesterday to stop speculating on who would succeed Pope John Paul II and they should instead pray for his recovery.

(story A10)

Surprise! Senate OKs nat'l budget

Each senator to get P120-M pork barrel

By Juliet Labog-Javellana
and TJ Burgonio

A DAY after expressing her displeasure over the failure of Congress to pass the proposed national budget, President Macapagal-Arroyo got what she wanted—a new P907.36-billion outlay for 2005.

The new budget provides for P120 million as pork-barrel funds for each senator, down from P200 million, and a P40-million allocation for every member of the House of Representatives, down from P70 million.

It was unprecedented in use, the Senate junked last night its own version of the budget and adopted in toto the 2005 budget proposed by the President and approved by the House of Representatives.

Senate President Franklin Drilon said Malacañang was "pleasantly surprised" by the development, which would pave the way for the immediate signing of the budget.

Asked if Malacañang had set a date for the signing, Drilon said: "No, they are still reviewing from their physical standpoint."

He said the Senate secretary general had communicated the

(BAREFOOT, A12)

BAREFOOT AT THE PALACE
President Arroyo has left go barefoot symbol customs, welcomes one of the indigenous peoples of southern and eastern Mindanao during the induction as Tausug of provincial watch (to consolidate chairperson of the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples.

Airlines, shipping exempt from VAT

By Cynthia D. Rodeo, Jil C. Cabacungan Jr.
and Michael Lim Ubac

THE HOUSE of Representatives killed the value-added tax (VAT) exemptions of certain goods and services like petroleum products and electricity but reserved a generous giving more incentives to the shipping and airlines industries.

Deputy Minority Leader and Solon Bloc Rebel, Baguio said yesterday.

The chamber approved House Bill No. 3705 on third and final reading on Monday night by a vote of 256-50-3.

Other legislators are vowing a last-ditch effort to prevent, which requires power and utilities to absorb the VAT.

House Minority Leader Francis Escudero called the provision a "freak," saying that power and oil firms would still pass on the extra revenues.

The bill has no chance openly opposition to be imposed on independent power producers (IPPs) and oil firms that would pass on the VAT to consumers, according to Escudero.

Supplies said the estimated revenue of 40.3705 gave an out shipping industry players such as Lance Tan, owner of Philippine

(AIRLINES, A12)

LOST in Malaysia. A midnight raid on a coastal resort city outside Kuala Lumpur rounded up 243 allegedly illegal immigrants. It was the first raid in the Malaysian authorities' countrywide dragnet to round up, whip and deport hundreds of thousands of illegals following the end of a two-month amnesty. AP

Don't force your sons to enter priesthood

By Christian V. Esguerra

PARENTS should never force their sons to enter the priesthood, Lingayen-Dagupan Archbishop Oscar Cruz said yesterday.

Cruz said the pressure parental attitude could be a factor in the decrease of certain persons in being ordained.

He said that since last year, at least 25 Filipino priests—all of them diocesan—had sought permission from the Vatican to abandon their vocations.

But the number is not actually alarming, considering that only at least 200 priests have been given dispensation in the last 20 years, according to Cruz, a former president of the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines.

Besides, there is no shortage of

(DON'T, A12)

Malaysia starts roundup, caning of illegals

KUALA LUMPUR—Malaysia launched Tuesday a nationwide operation to round up, whip and deport hundreds of thousands of illegal immigrants after a 4-month amnesty ended at midnight.

In one of the earliest raids, about 400 government officials and immigration officials—some armed with parangs and others with nightsticks—cordoned off a construction area outside Kuala Lumpur and detained 243 foreigners.

Some of them tried to flee into a nearby jungle in the early morning darkness.

The volunteer raiders are paid 60 ringgit ($21) for each illegal caught in the nationwide operation, codenamed "Ops Nyah."

Early reports did not mention Filipinos as among those initially arrested.

In Manila, the Department of Foreign Affairs pledged to protect the rights of Filipino workers who might be involved in the crackdown, by having Malaysian lawyers for them. (See related story on Page A7.)

Indonesia and the Philippines, along with human rights groups, criticized the Malaysian treatment

(MALAYSIA, A12)

'Tell kids, parents about sex'

By Christian V. Esguerra

PEDRO, talk about sex.

Health Secretary Manuel Dayrit yesterday cautioned parents not to talk to their children about sex as a way to lower the population boom here in the country.

As many as 20 percent of couples in the country are unaware that having sex can result in babies, according to the health secretary.

(PEDRO, A12)

'Selective logging like haircuts for bald men'

By Philip C. Tubeza
and Blanche S. Rivera

IMPLEMENTING selective logging in the country is like giving haircuts for bald people.

This was the metaphor that Bukidnon Rep. Jose Miguel Zubiri employed yesterday in canvassing Environment Secretary Michael Defensor's opposed lifting the log ban in certain regions, (including natural) growth forests.

Zubiri expressed "alarm" that the Department of Environment and Natural Resources was even considering the idea, and said the problem with the approach was that it "does not protect our remaining forests from the ax."

"You cannot do what is still there," he said in a statement. "It will be superfluous to impose a log ban to some where there are no more trees to cut. Limited logging is tantamount to cutting. Banal pardon ang kalbo, pero pandong gayam ang mga bobok (bald people are limited by bald people but allowed for those who still have hair)."

Defensor proposed on Monday a "limited log ban," under which logging by timber license agreement holders would be allowed for two or three years but only in areas with sufficient forest cover.

(SELECTIVE, A12)

CIRCUITOUS. From Tondo to Muntinlupa to Village

BAD HAIR DAY

Village resident baffles House drugs probers

By Michael Lim Ubac

NATIONAL Bureau of Investigation Director Reynaldo Wycoco yesterday said he had the "goods" on Israel Canyon, who is suspected to have links with the Chinese who allegedly run shabu labora, seats in a posh subdivision in Parañaque.

Wycoco told lawmakers in an executive session hearing of the House of Representatives committee on dangerous drugs that he would divulge the "goods" on Canyon, a former president of the Multinational Village Homeowners Association, as well as the names of other drug lords in Parañaque.

Lawmakers were baffled when Canyon showed up at the executive session hearing because he wanted to clear his name. However, questions were rounding his links to the drug cartel persisted.

The House inquiry came after a drug shabu laboratory was raided in the village, yielding explosives, equipment and chemicals used to produce methamphetamine hydrochloride, or

(VILLAGE, A12)

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 2, 2005

A1

WEATHER FORECAST

Second FRONTPAGE

Joker wants gov't men in SMC fired

PRESIDENT Macapagal-Arroyo should check on the loyalty of—if not actually fire—the seven government-appointed directors in San Miguel Corp., Sen. Joker Arroyo said yesterday.

The administration senator questioned why the seven SMC directors, who are supposed to represent the government's interests in the food and beverage giant, all voted for the stock rights option that could dilute the government's 43 percent stake.

"It would be in order for the President to create an inquiry on the conduct of the government directors in San Miguel on this matter. After all, the government directors are the board of both private and government corporations are there not as observers, but matters to protect and promote the interest of the government," Senator Arroyo said in a statement.

Arroyo said the seven directors voted with the majority in the SMC board when it approved a stock rights offering for sale of over P10 to P20 billion by issuing additional shares equivalent to 15 percent of its outstanding capital stock. This would allow the balance of power in the country's biggest food conglomerate and dilute the share of government, which is the biggest stockholder of SMC.

Dueling rules

Controversial businessman Lucio "Tanding" Co Jr., the SMC chair controls the 15-member SMC board through his 20 percent holdings and those of his allies, the Japan-based Kirin which has 28 percent, and Singapur Bond Pte which has 8 percent and other investors.

The government holds seven board seats, through its estimated 43 percent stake resulting of the 25 percent-plus-one-share veto they had shares and the commissioners' holdings of the seventeen top position firmly.

"The government directors are there to protect and enhance the government's interests," Senator Arroyo said.

"When the SMC board makes any move that might prejudice their principals, in this case the Presidential Commission on Good Government, the Government Service Insurance System and the Social Security System, they are duty-bound to protect the estate or at least get instructions on how they should vote," he said.

The same government SMC directors are: COD president and general manager Winston Garcia, BIR president and CEO Genaro de la Paz and five PCGG-appointed directors—Manuel S. Imperial, Lee Khoo, Octavio Victor Espiritu, Leandro de Silva Jose and Basilio Espiritu.

Unanimous vote

Espiritu resigned his directorship in May 2004. It could not be ascertained who replaced him.

Senator Arroyo said the seven government-appointed directors voted with the eight pro-management SMC directors resulting in a unanimous vote for the stock offering.

Their action cost the government P9 billion, he said.

The senator said the President should be commended for promptly correcting the situation.

Mr Arroyo ordered the Development Bank of the Philippines to buy SMC shares to preserve the government's stake in the company.

"This would not have happened and the government hardened with having to raise P6 billion if only the seven government directors acted. An instruction or, from the President would be such an important matter," Senator Arroyo said. *Juliet Labog-Javellana*

HOT SO FAST

Retired Gen. Jose M. Calimlim, Task Force Subic chief (left), briefs visiting Manila customs officials led by Deputy Commissioner Celso Templo (right) and Manuela Quaderno, chief of the Customs Enforcement and Security Service, at the import yard in Subic, which was discovered inside a container. The container was declared to be loaded only with 52,000 rounds of automotive spare parts.

Soriquez files libel suit against DPWH accuser

By D.J. Yap

DEPWHILE Secretary Florante Soriquez of the Department of Public Works and Highways has filed a P50-million libel suit against the DPWH official who had accused him of weak leadership and impropriety and unavoidably caused his ouster from the top public works post.

Soriquez, who served as acting public works secretary for one year and 10 months, accused Assistant Secretary Raul Asis of disseminating false and malicious statements about him while Presidential Management Secretary Mike Arroyo was "in the midst of choosing a permanent secretary of the department."

The President eventually appointed Soriquez and replaced him with her loyal favor by Administration Rafael Lotilla Jr.

She did not rush him, however, but returned him to his former post in public works undersecretary.

In the complaint he filed in the Quezon City prosecutor's office, Soriquez cited a Feb. 8 press conference where Asis supposedly read and distributed an "official statement" that the former acting secretary disbursed contractual fake and malicious remarks.

In the statement titled "DPWH Top Executives Call for Soriquez Ouster," Asis said he was speaking for "Group 27" which was composed of key public works officials disenchanted with Soriquez's performance.

The statement accused Soriquez of demoting PSLMB a month through much of the 18 DPWH regional directors unprepared, to be his personal image-building. It also charged that Soriquez was "degrading the professional[ism]" of the department by designating unqualified engineers in certain offices.

The statement increased what charges against Soriquez, particularly Against del Sur Rep. Isabelle Pimentel accusation that he had accepted P250 million in kickbacks from DPWH district officers.

Pimentel alleged that Soriquez had also demanded P50,000 (monthly) from the DPWH's 175 districts, a 10-percent "cash cut-in" from government projects, and a 5-percent share from foreign-assisted projects.

Soriquez has denied the charges, now under investigation by the Presidential Anti-Graft Commission upon Mrs Arroyo's orders.

Soriquez said Asis' statement was malicious not only because it was false "but also because of its timing."

If Asis' intentions were honest, said Soriquez, he should have filed the necessary criminal and administrative complaints, listing the chain of the DPWH's previous ministrations.

Soriquez also said that several of the DPWH officials in the statement had not authorized Asis to use their names.

Asis could not be immediately reached for comments.

Families of ferry victims want memorial

By Leila B. Salaverria

ALL they want is a memorial for their loved ones.

Families of the Superferry 14 bombing victims, whose bodies remain missing, have called on government officials and management of the shipping line, to help them realize a project to build a memorial for their relatives.

Edward Lopez, who lost his brother in the 80s, 27 members last year, said the victims' kin would secure the National Disaster Coordinating Council, members of Congress and Superferry management to make their request official.

"The request is very simple. All the families want is a common remembrance or memorial for the victims whose remains have yet to be found," Lopez said in a phone interview.

According to Lopez, the letter will be signed by Dolores Bandarlipe, who said she is representing the families. Bandarlipe lost a wife and a child in the fire.

A total of 116 passengers were reported missing by the Philippine Bureau of Immigration right after the explosion incited last February 27 that engulfed the Superferry 14 management had said only 111 passengers had entered looking for them.

The last reported count of victims who had been identified was 62, based on the figures from the NBI, which had been tasked to identify the remains recovered from the ship.

PNCC sent 800 people on board the 10,000-ton Superferry 14 was set to sail from Manila to Cagayan de Oro from Manila when it caught fire last year after an explosion. The Abu Sayyaf, who is being linked to explosion of the ferry, allegedly planted and Osama bin Laden's al Qaeda network, had claimed responsibility for the bombing.

Lopez said the Philippine Government should play a part in helping the families realize their project. "I believe it is their moral obligation," he said.

The victims' families would also ask authorities to spare from cremation the bones recovered from the ship but which could not have not been identified, he said.

The group supported that these bones be buried in a common grave or memorial that will be built for the victims whose bodies were never found, Lopez added.

He said the victims perished in a fire and pulling the bones in flames again would be very painful for their relatives.

Last Sunday, several relatives of the victims assembled at Rizal Park in Manila, Manila, to offer flowers and prayers on the first death anniversary of their loved ones.

Abu faces rough sailing at CA

LUBAO: Homobono Adaza said yesterday he would oppose retired Police chief Hilario Abu's confirmation as head of the Army unless he (Abu) publicly criticized the prostitution system in the armed forces.

Adaza yesterday made his first move by filing a complaint with the Persons Disabilities Committee against the retired general, an officer of the rank of major general, for conduct unbecoming an officer and a gentleman and conduct prejudicial to good order and military discipline under Articles 96 and 97 of the Articles of War, respectively.

Adaza is blocking Abu's confirmation in connection with the compliance of Lt. Col. Eduardo Mapalo, who has gone into hiding since December after the latter linked to a supposed plot to destabilize the government.

"It's a case of persecution," Adaza said, adding that Abu had denied allegation of the prostitution.

In his letter, Adaza said, he will file an opposition to Abu's confirmation before the Commission on Appointments. "We'll file the same grounds, his prostitution of Colonel Mapalo," Adaza said separate.

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A GREAT WAY TO FLY

Former cop chief probed for killing of journalist

By Armand N. Nocum

JUSTICE Secretary Raul Gonzalez has ordered the investigation of the former police chief of Pagadian City for allegedly impeding the investigation into the killing of broadcast journalist Edgar Damalerio on May 31, 2003.

In a press briefing, Gonzalez said that former Supt. Aniel Hontiveros, now a consultant in the mayor in Pagadian, will be subjected to preliminary investigation and could be included in the charge sheet if there was probable cause.

Gonzalez's order came after meeting with officials of the Freedom Fund for Filipino Journalists Inc., which is pushing for the resolution of media killings.

The PFFJ said Gonzalez promises that "Hontiveros will be arraigned to hamper the investigation by protecting a 'hacienda criminal'" who tagged another suspect in Damalerio's killing instead of PO1 Guillermo Wapile, the prime suspect.

Wapile, who escaped from detention in 2003 but surrendered to the police on Sept. 13, 2004, was charged with the murder of Damalerio before the regional trial court in Zamboanga on Nov. 18, 2003.

Gonzalez promised to give "full support" to efforts to prosecute the killer of Damalerio as well as others responsible for the killings of journalists in the country.

"We consider attacks of this nature as attacks against democracy," he said, adding that the Department of Justice will continue to give full protection to the witnesses and relatives of Damalerio.

Gonzalez has also asked the Supreme Court to effect the transfer of the hearing on the Damalerio case from Zamboanga to Cebu. "We are doing this to ensure that witnesses are not killed or murdered in relation to heinous crimes," he said.

Two of the three witnesses in the Damalerio slaying had already been killed by unknown assailants.

Gov't launches nationwide hunt for 'Boy Negro'

By Joan Escandor Jr., PDI Southern Luzon Bureau
and Luige Q. del Puerto in Manila

LIBANAN: Lamentors line the refugees and police operatives have launched a manhunt for "Boy Negro," the third suspect in the Valentine's Day bombing in Makati City who eluded arrest when explosives stopped down on his house in Barangay Mambala Northern at 11:30 a.m. on Monday.

A composite team of the Military Intelligence Group, National Bureau of Investigation and Philippine National Police particularly continued pursuit operations against the suspect identified as Gappal Datoa, also known as "Boy Negro" and "Colonel Tinamo."

Supt. Renato Gumban, Bicol regional intelligence officer based in Camp Gen. Simeon Ola, said Datoa sustained gunshot wounds in the left hip during a brief firefight with arresting officers who were to move on arrest warrant on the suspect who managed to escape toward the forested areas of Buenos and San Vicente complex in Camarines Sur.

Police had earlier tagged a certain "Mahiber" a.k.a. "Boy Negro" as the supplier of the explosives which Marilao extremists used in the Makati bus bombing which killed four people and injured several others.

Authorities were able to trace the whereabouts of "Boy Negro" through a certain Cpl. Dara, the suspect's 18-year-old wife, a resident of Sitio Olivas.

Operatives then managed detain on the suspect's house but the latter was it not with the apprehending officers and managed to escape.

Witnesses said the fleeing bombing suspect was seen bleeding.

At about 3 p.m. on Monday the bombing suspect was again spotted somewhere in San Ramon, a neighboring village south of Mambala Marivo.

In Manila, National Capital Region Police Office chief Director Avelino Razon confirmed that "Boy Negro" eluded arrest during the raid in Camarines Sur.

"Yes, but he was able to go away," Razon told the INQUIRER.

Senior Supt. Leopoldo Bataoil said "Boy Negro" had apparently hidden in Barangay Mambala Norte, Libmanan, Camarines Sur.

"He was about to be served an arrest warrant when he shot it out," Bataoil said, quoting Bicol Region chief Chief Supt. Avelino Mesquerda.

"There was no exchange of gunfire and he was wounded," he said.

According to Dara, her husband was sitting on the stairs of her father's house when suddenly a man with a gun pulled him with "Pio!"

Sensing danger, she said, her husband, whom she knew as Hen Hen Jamin, 24, immediately stood up and ran inside the house, went through the kitchen and escaped through the back door.

The latter faced several gunshots being fired.

Dara, who became a Muslim convert when she married "Boy Negro" on March 8, 2004, and was renamed Hannah Yasmin, said she had no knowledge about the activities of her husband.

She said "Boy Negro" went to Manila on Feb. 10 and came back on Feb. 14.

She said her husband had told her he would look for a job in Manila.

Dara said she noticed nothing unusual about her husband, except that he never talked about things beyond their relationship.

She said they used to live with his aunt in Mabalibay Village in Tagaig.

Dara said she was working as a sales attendant at Dell's Bakery in Monumento Tagaig when they became roommates for three months in 2003. With a report from Michael D. Aquino, PDI Southern Luzon Bureau

Cops charge Moro leader for Sulu raid

POLICE said Tuesday they would charge a Moro rebel leader and his fighters for attacks on civilians that set off Davao clashes, killing 79 people and displacing more than 30,000 villagers.

Government troops continued to hunt down Eladio Malik and up to 300 of his men, who had fled to small groups after soldiers captured their major encampment near Panamao town in July two weeks ago, officials said.

Police Director Vidal Querol said charges of murder, arson, and murder and arson would be filed this week against Malik and his men for attacking an Army detachment in Panamao, killing a soldier, wounding two civilians and setting houses ablaze.

The Feb. 7 attack provoked a major offensive by more than 2,000 troops that left 38 soldiers and more than 40 gunmen dead in fierce fighting in Panamao and outlying towns.

The clashes have largely subsided, but thousands of villagers have refused to return home, fearing a resurgence of violence with continuing military operations.

Armed Forces chief of staff Gen. Efren Abu Bera to Julio Torre day on orders of President Macapagal-Arroyo to assess whether or not the government should forge a ceasefire with Malik's group. Local officials had appealed to Mr. Arroyo to declare a truce.

During a talk with about 100 soldiers and Marines, Abu gave no hint of what he would propose or the President—a truce or continued operations against Malik's group.

But he asked the troops loudly, "Are you still ready to fight? Are you still brave?" And the men replied equally as loud: "Yes, sir."

Charges against Malik would be filed despite a possible truce, Querol said.

"Their criminal activities could not be wiped out by a ceasefire. Justice must be rendered to the victims," Querol told The Associated Press by telephone.

Army Brig. Gen. Agustin Demaala, commander of troops on Jolo, backed Querol, saying Malik and his men should be punished.

"No one is above the law," he said.

The long-jailed leader of the rebels, Nur Misuari, would not be charged because investigators have not found any evidence or witnesses to back allegations by some government officials that he had ordered the attacks, Querol said.

The rebels said they had wanted to avenge the shooting deaths of three civilians—allegedly including a child—by troops who had barged into a community of Misuari followers while pursuing suspected rebels from the al-Qaida-linked Abu Sayyaf group.

Misuari formerly headed the Moro National Liberation Front, a large Muslim separatist group that accepted limited autonomy and signed a peace accord with the government in 1996.

But violence flared up again years later and Misuari was imprisoned on charges of rebellion.

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PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER
WEDNESDAY, MARCH 2, 2005

'Way Kurat' blinks in face of threats

By Philip C. Tubeza

"WAY KURAT" Marbo.

Camarines Sur Rep. Manuel Zamora yesterday said he would have to go into hiding after allegedly receiving death threats from gold miners in Mt. Diwalwal.

The squabbles and killings in the gold rush have apparently worsened as much that even Filipino military intelligence chief Gen. Victor Corpus, head of the government agency overseeing the mining activities, confronted Zamora on Wednesday about reports that he had hired gunmen to kill Corpus.

"This is serious... I'd rather be a living coward than a dead hero," Zamora said in a press conference.

Zamora said he suspected illegal miners and their financiers in military intelligence to be behind the threats against him and the supposed plot against Corpus.

He said he planned to skip sessions at the House of Representatives until those who were after him are identified or "until such time that my colleagues will be able to help me."

Zamora said he did not feel safe in Congress and that he would also have to move around to different safehouses. He said he would also stop going to Congress on his bicycle.

"They only make reconnaissance for you when you're dead," Zamora said.

He said he had asked help from the Presidential Anti-Illegal Activities, or get more security escorts. But up to yesterday, Zamora said he had yet to get additional security detail.

He said he told Navy chief of staff Tom Illeto also told him that he had yet to receive Zamora's request.

Zamora said he learned about the alleged plan to kill him in August after he was alerted by Mankayan Vice Mayor Teresito Cabag.

Cabag told him that there was a P5-million price on his head and that of Councilor Gerry Cajes and a civilian named Rolando Bangsa.

Two weeks after the rift, Bagtic's security guard was shot dead. In November, Councilor Cajes was shot in the eye but he survived.

ZAMORA

Then on Wednesday, Zamora received a call from Socioeconomic Planning Secretary Romulo Neri who told the congressman that he was allegedly involved in a plot to kill Corpus.

Zamora said he met Corpus later that day in the office of Speaker Jose de Venecia, where the retired general confronted him about a "military intelligence report" that Zamora and three other officials had hired 11 gunmen to kill Corpus.

The other officials allegedly involved in the plot were Compostela Gov. Arturo Caballero, provincial board member Arthur Uy and Nigum Mayor Ben Uy.

Zamora said he vehemently denied the intelligence report and told Corpus that he had no quarrel with him. He said the general only nodded and then sarcastically said, "Kung ganun... hindi ako magpapa-assist (If that's the case, I won't be the first one.)."

"It was then that I was shocked... I told him that maybe the intelligence report was wrong. I have nothing against him, Corpus," Zamora said.

He said that his adversary might be trying to drive a wedge between him and Corpus, head of the National Resources and Development Corporation, which is overseeing mining activities in Mt. Diwalwal.

Airlines, shipping ...

Coming up A2

Airlines (PAL), and the Aboitiz clan, which is engaged in shipping, now fall.

Under the bill, shipping and airline companies would avail themselves of tax credits, according to Espina.

He said the bill expanded the zero-rated service from "services rendered to vessels engaged exclusively in international shipping" in the original law to "services rendered to vessels or aircraft engaged in international shipping or international air transport operations, including leases of property for the same purpose."

He mentioned other new exemptions:

■ Importation or lease of passengers or cargo vessels and cargo, including engine, equipment and repair parts, for domestic or international transport.

■ Importation of fuel, goods and supplies by vessels and aircraft for use in international shipping or international air transport operations.

■ Sale of power generated through biomass, wind and solar energy.

"Mr. Speaker, the owners of [airline and shipping] firms are so lucky why the Filipino people," Espina said.

A PAL spokesperson said airlines were exempted from VAT and all other taxes except for the two-percent franchise tax on gross revenues, which is provided for under the law that granted them a congressional franchise.

He said he could not give added comments because he had not seen HB 3705.

Speaker Jose de Venecia Jr. said the bill was expected to yield P25 billion in new money for the government.

Staggered rates

De Venecia said the bill recognized Malacañang's proposal to raise the VAT rate from 10 percent to 12 percent but also introduced reduced VAT rates as follows:

■ from 10 percent to 6 percent on locally manufactured, generic medicine and basic food (sardines and mackerel, cooking oil, refined sugar, and packed noodle-based products such as mihi, miswa, bihon, canned corned and misua/mi);

■ from 10 percent to 0 percent on imported generic medicine and basic processed foods; and

■ from zero to 4 percent on petroleum products, including the raw materials used in the manufacture, and services rendered by power generation companies, which shall be increased to 6 percent, 8 percent and 12 percent on the 2nd, 3rd and 4th year of implementation, respectively.

Liquefied petroleum gas and petroleal will continue to be VAT-exempt.

The bill also removed the 1.5-percent percentage income tax on agricultural merchants of agri-processors.

But lawyers and doctors will be covered by a 10-percent VAT. This, however, can be waived if they serve the poor, like farmers, by showing a certification from appropriate government agencies.

De Venecia said the expanded VAT and the lifting of VAT exemptions provided safety nets for the poor by prohibiting sellers of petroleum products and power generation companies from passing on the VAT either directly or indirectly to consumers.

No pass-on provision

"They will be criminally liable under the penal provisions under HB 3705," De Venecia said, adding that the "no pass on" provision for petroleum products and electricity was meant to protect the poor.

The VAT on other goods and services can be passed on to consumers.

But Bayan Muna Rep. Teodoro Casiño, who voted against HB 3705, agreed with Enrile on that nothing could prevent power and oil companies from passing on the tax to consumers.

Casiño said the deregulated oil industry had no mechanism to prevent the passing on of the VAT to consumers.

Protecting poor

He introduced an amendment, later approved by the chamber, requiring several government agencies and departments to monitor and regulate the pricing of electricity and petroleum products.

"Such a provision introducing price controls and the stabilization of monetary provisions in the BW contracts are not enough to prevent oil companies and power producers, with the connivance of the executive, from drastically increasing the prices of basic goods and services," Casiño said.

He said he introduced the amendments to strengthen the "pass-on" prohibition. "But I'm afraid that that is not enough to protect our people. Even another unnecessary and unjust tax burden," he said.

House Majority Leader Prospero Nograles said a floor copy of the bill was scheduled to be transmitted to the Senate yesterday afternoon.

"We're happy with the result. [of the voting]. This is a certified bill and we just acted on it. We've included safety nets and we've protected the poor," Nograles said.

Laudable

Malacañang praised the House for passing the bill.

"The House move to strengthen the VAT bill is laudable and hinges on three recent fiscal reform goals," said Press Secretary Ignacio Bunye.

"We hope this momentum is followed through by collective statesmanship in Congress," he said in a statement just hours after members of the House wrapped up a marathon session on the lifting of VAT exemptions.

The Senate ways and means committee has declared that it was not keen on approving Malacañang's proposal to raise the VAT rate from 10 percent to 12 percent because lifting the VAT exemptions would be enough to generate President Macapagal-Arroyo's target of P88 billion in revenues.

But Malacañang said the government needed the lifting of exemptions and the two-percentage point increase in VAT to generate more than P88 billion.

Ms Arroyo had expressed displeasure over the slow pace of legislation in the Senate not only in the passage of the VAT bill but also the 2005 budget.

Businessmen's response

Businessmen interviewed by the business-friendly Malacañang's enthusiasm over the the lifting of VAT exemptions in the House.

"It would persuade more people to accept the new VAT proposal. A law that applies to all is more defensible," said Francis Chua, executive vice president of the Federation of Filipino-Chinese Chambers of Commerce.

Ambassador Raul T. Concepcion said that in his discussion with entrepreneurial leaders, the VAT rate increase and the lifting of exemptions were likely to be approved at the earliest by next week or at the latest before the start of Holy Week.

Concepcion urged Malacañang to stop making assurances that the VAT bills would have no impact on prices of basic goods.

Prices to rise

"That's propaganda. Prices are bound to rise," he said.

He said the government should also keep an eye on price adjustments in oligopolistic [or markets with few players that dictate prices] specially in the oil industry that would start pacing VAT with the enactment of the VAT reforms.

"The government must ensure that only the VAT [component] actually paid should be passed on to consumers," Concepcion said.

VAT exemption on co-ops not lifted

By Ryan D. Rosario
PDI Mindanao Bureau

DAVAO CITY—Leaders of the cooperative movement in the country learned a sigh of relief with the decision of the House of Representatives to retain the exemptions of cooperatives from the value-added tax (VAT).

House Bill No. 3705 retains the VAT exemptions of cooperatives, except in sales by agricultural cooperatives to non-members.

Ann Loreto Pecilano, secretary general of the National Confederation of Cooperatives (Naticop), attributed the retention of the VAT exemption of cooperatives to the "intense lobbying effort" by national co-spokesmen.

But they are not letting their guard down.

Provision said "the battle [to retain the exemptions] shifts to the Senate this time."

He said a protest rally would be launched Wednesday in key cities to impress upon senators the co-ops' strong opposition to a Senate proposal to lift their exemption.

Sections 61 and 62 of the Cooperative Code already subject to tax big cooperatives as well as transactions of cooperatives with non-members, he said.

Adding a new layer of taxes for cooperatives defeats the purpose of allowing the growth of self-help schemes like cooperatives as a strategy to fight poverty, he added.

"Amid the juicy incentives granted to multinational corporations, the exemptions are not even enough to level the playing field. Insisting on an additional tax levy for cooperatives is therefore unjust and unfair, complained Pecilano.

He, however, acknowledged the need to have the national government's revenue intake to meet its fiscal obligations.

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GRAVE HEART

Sapida Echavez receives the First Junior Fire Marshal medallion in livery from Sec. Manny Villar for helping bring her family, trapped in a burning building, to safe ground. The award was given by the Quezon City Fire Department.

Car theft gang victimizes banks, insurers, buyers

By Margaux C. Ortiz

ITS LIKE having three birds with one stone.

The National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) on Monday night unveiled upon what they described as a new modus operandi of a car theft syndicate that victimizes banks, insurance firms and prospective buyers.

An NBI agent said that, with the new ploy, the syndicate members double the price of a "stolen" vehicle.

Two men identified as Erwin Tan, of Baler Street, Quezon City and Jesse Lloyd Go, of Nicholas Street, Tondo, Manila, were being questioned by the NBI in relation to the case.

Citing the claims of an informant, an NBI investigator who requested anonymity said members of the syndicate buy new and expensive vehicles using a bank loan. They then declare the vehicle as stolen.

However, what the syndicate allegedly actually does is that it tampers with the vehicle's chassis and serial numbers so it could be resold to the bluapo or bitsahanan.

Meanwhile, the syndicate makes a fraudulent insurance claim.

According to an NBI investigator, Tan allegedly bought two sports utility vehicles (SUVs), a Toyota Prado and a Mitsubishi Montero, through a bank loan a few days ago.

The NBI said Tan and Go were stopped by NBI agents at Plus 12 of the North Diversion Road in Valenzuela, Monday.

But Go denied that he or Tan were involved in any syndicate.

Go said he was just accompanying Tan and that they were having coffee at a Seabelle outlet in the Blue Wave on Dunkaks Macapagal Avenue in Pasay City at about 9 p.m. when NBI agents took Pasay into custody.

He added that he was surprised to hear later that they were being linked to a car theft syndicate.

Bomb crash course for traffic aides

By Tarra Y. Quismundo

TO HELP boost the government's campaign against terrorism, the Metropolitan Manila Development Authority (MMDA) will train traffic aides in bomb detection and identification to be handled by explosives experts.

Any crisis in the country now recently ended such bomb blasts that killed eight people and injured 150 others.

Some 1,000 MMDA traffic aides are set to undergo the training soon according to Angelito Sergel de Dios, MMDA Traffic Operations Center Executive Director.

What to look for

"The training program is designed to show traffic aides what they should look for.

"They cannot identify explosives if they don't know what they look like," he said the bayanihan yesterday.

Sergel de Dios said MMDA traffic aides, posted all over Metro Manila's main thoroughfares, would go through a crash course on bomb identification, as part of the agency's efforts to help in the anti-terror campaign in Metro Manila.

Previous incidents

"For instance, they would be taught what a C4 or TNT looks like," said the traffic chief, referring to explosives that had been used in previous terror attacks all over the country, including the recent Valentine's Day bombings.

The triple attacks occurred in the cities of Makati, Davao and Davao.

Sergel de Dios said MMDA traffic aides, posted all over Metro Manila's main thoroughfares, would go through a crash course on bomb identification, as part of the agency's efforts to help in the anti-terror campaign in Metro Manila.

Identification

"They [traffic aides] man the streets more than eight hours a day together with the policemen on duty.

"I'm very sure they could easily identify suspicious-looking persons involved in terrorist activities," MMDA Chair Bayani Fernando said in a statement.

Once equipped with the basics of bomb identification, the traffic aides are expected to report sightings of suspicious packages whom they are posted.

In case they find suspicious-looking packages, Sergel de Dios said the MMDA men would immediately coordinate response activities with the police.

Facilitators

MMDA traffic aides had gone through an explosive identification training in 2002, shortly after a bomber Harvest Inn exploded in Balintawak, Quezon City, in October.

Sergel de Dios said the MMDA has yet to finalize which agency to tap as facilitators of the explosives crash course.

Eusebio asks traders not to pay taxes, yet

By Edson C. Tandoc Jr.

TORN between two local governments?

Better not pay taxes in the meantime, Pasig City Mayor Vicente Eusebio told confused mall owners at the centennial Sta. Lucia mall property.

The mall is the subject of a dispute between the governments of Pasig City and Cainta, Rizal.

"I suggest for them not to pay yet until a final decision is reached. Let us just wait and see," Eusebio told the business yesterday.

On the other hand, Cainta Mayor Met Regan is asking mall owners to continue paying taxes to Cainta.

Not the solution

"That is not the solution to the problem" said Regan. "I appeal to mall owners to continue paying taxes to Cainta."

Both local governments have set up collection booths in the mall, confusing mall owners.

Earlier, Pasig City won a tax collection case against Sta. Lucia. Cainta filed an appeal but it was rejected by the Court of Appeals.

Cainta then filed a motion to quash the ruled reconsideration which the Pasig City Regional Trial Court had handed down.

And while the motion to quash is being heard, the court also gave a status quo order last week.

But were the interpretation of the order is being debated by the two local governments.

Cainta's plea

Regan said the mall owners should continue paying to Cainta like what they had been doing before the case.

But Pasig City legal officer Carlos Abesamis said that because the court had already released a writ of execution, the status quo order meant that the property should be considered to be within Pasig City.

"We are not after the money. We want to safeguard our people so we are advising them not to pay yet," Eusebio said.

Should it be decided, finally, that the property is within Pasig City, the mall owners would not have to pay any penalty, he explained.

QC dads target 'balut' vendors

By DJ Yap

BEFORE he gets a chance to make a sales pitch in that all too familiar tall, soft yous' friendly neighborhood "balut" blend egg vendor his police detainees first.

In a bid to stamp out nighttime crime in Quezon City, councilors are "strongly requesting" vendors who work nights to carry identification cards if police chase after with them.

Principal author Jonatan Malabayan and 16 other City councilors proposed the ordinance, noting that crime incidence is high during the night.

"If a 'balut' vendor has his police clearance certificate with him, he will know he's not just pretending as he is vendor while casing the neighborhood for prospective victims," a legislative offices of Malabayan said.

A vendor selling green mangoes in Philcoa, Quezon City, said getting a police clearance would not make much of a difference.

Lourdes Oga-oga, 55, said a vendor is required to get a barangay clearance and other clearance forms from City Hall anyway.

'Dodong' bids adieu, but promises to be back

By Tarra Y. Quismundo

HE MIGHT have said goodbye, but he promised not to fade away.

After stepping down from the helm of the country's premier university, former University of the Philippines president Francisco "Dodong" Nemenzo said he would still be around, doing what he can for his country.

"If we, as a people, has faith in our own capacity to create a better future, we can never lose sound the current mood. It is time to think of an alternative program, but a feasible one, around which people can rally," said Nemenzo in his farewell speech to the UP community.

Nemenzo retired as university president on Feb. 9, his 70th birthday after five years of heading the UP system.

Once a founding member of the defunct Partido Komunista ng Pilipinas, the man who had spent what seemed like a lifetime in the academe, was a political science professor for 42 years, and had assumed various administrative posts in the state university.

"I plan to bring together the best brains in UP and in the progressive movement to craft a blueprint for feasible Alternative," he said.

"I see to a better position to appraise a think-tank now that I am no longer saddled with administrative responsibilities," said Nemenzo in his speech.

Nemenzo had given UP such a road map, a program he called the Five-Year Plan. Following his own map, Nemenzo implemented programs to help UP truly live up to its reputation of being one of the country's best.

Under his administration, Nemenzo modernized UP laboratories and libraries, upgraded degree programs, improved facilities, sent faculty members abroad, and boosted their published faculty research.

Even if the father of three has retired, a source there would be no let-up in his continuing quest for excellence. "What the country is looking for right now is a comprehensive and well-prepared program that would lead us to where we should go and what we should do," he said.

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- The Status of Mobile Business in the Philippines

March 12 (9am - 9pm)
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RP ready to hire Malaysian lawyers to defend Pinoys

By Volt Contreras

THE DEPARTMENT of Foreign Affairs said it was prepared to hire Malaysian lawyers for Filipinos who might be arrested in Kuala Lumpur's renewed crackdown on illegal migrants.

Foreign affairs spokesperson Officer-in Amyre expressed confidence that the Malaysian envoy would "certainly be different from 2002," at least as far as it concerned Filipino migrants.

He was referring to a similarly massive operation undertaken by Malaysia three years ago, which netted thousands of Filipinos into "boat people" picked up by Philippine Navy ships.

Many returned to the country penniless and with tales of anguish and alleged human rights abuses.

Citing DFA estimates, Amyre said between 180,000 and 200,000 Filipinos were believed to be in Malaysia when that country stepped up the enforcement of immigration laws in August last year.

Around 56,000 Filipinos have since returned to the Philippines traveling by kumpit or prump boats, and skipping immigration desks or going through official channels, he said.

As of yesterday, Day One of the renewed crackdown, the DFA had yet to receive reports that Filipinos were among those arrested, he said.

"Certainly it will be different from 2002 because we have prepared for this long before the expected end of the deadline," Amyre told reporters.

Citing an example of the DFA's preparations, Amyre said: "We have set resources to hire lawyers ... Malaysian lawyers, unless there are also Filipino lawyers who can practice there."

"The department will assure [us] that the rights of the Filipinos under Malaysian laws, as well as their rights under applicable international laws, are recognized and respected," he stressed.

Malaysia starts roundup, caning of illegals

From page A1

of detainees and urged Malaysia not to cane the illegal workers, standard punishment there for a range of crimes.

RP-Malaysia talks

Caning administered on the buttocks, splits the skin and leaves lifelong scars.

A high-level Malaysian government team is scheduled to visit the Philippines on March 7 to thrash out the mechanics for the repatriation and reemployment of Filipino migrants, particularly in Sabah.

The first meeting of the Philippine-Malaysia Joint Committee on Sabah Repatriates is designed to resolve the problem of illegal migration between the two countries, according to Labor Undersecretary Manuel Imson.

Imson said the committee would discuss mechanisms for the repatriation of undocumented Filipinos and the processing of their papers so they could be reemployed in Malaysia.

Curbing illegal migration

The committee will also discuss how Philippine and Malaysian agencies can effectively monitor cross-border movements and illegal migration.

Last week, officials from the foreign affairs and social welfare departments went to Malaysia to clarify matters regarding the crackdown on illegal aliens.

Malaysian Human Resources Minister Datuk Dr. Fong Chan Onn told the Philippine group that Kuala Lumpur viewed the issue of undocumented workers as "more of a human problem" and gave assurances that deported Filipinos would be reemployed.

Backbone of menial force

Forty among the immigrants who failed to produce proper documents during Tuesday's raid were taken to a detention center pending trial where they face fines, caning or jail, said Mohamad Rashi Hussein, an official who led the raid.

Malaysia offered illegal workers a chance to return home without facing any penalties in an amnesty that started last October and expired on Monday.

Some 400,000 illegal workers departed, but Malaysian officials said about half a million remained.

Foreign workers from Indonesia, Philippines, Bangladesh and India form the backbone of Malaysia's menial work force, sustaining the construction industry and plantations.

They also work in restaurants and do other low-paying jobs that Malaysians won't take. Besides illegal workers, some one million other foreigners are working here legally.

Human rights concerns

"It is a successful operation. No one was injured. We will conduct more raids," said Mohamad Amindin Mohamad Yusof, director of the 300,000-strong civilian security force who led the raid.

The crackdown against illegal immigrants, mainly Indonesians, marked the end of an amnesty which had come been extended at Jakarta's request.

Human rights groups had expressed concern about the massive crackdown, which they said was open to abuse.

"There is a high potential for human abuses to occur considering the magnitude of the operation," National Human Rights Society secretary general Elizabeth Wong said.

Amnesty International earlier this month urged Malaysia to halt the planned deportation of illegals amid fears some could face execution or torture in their home countries.

Amnesty International

Migrants from Burma (Myanmar), Nepal and Aceh could be subjected to serious human rights violations if they were sent home, it said.

One worker detained Sunday, 31-year-old Amir, was sobbed after a little bid to contain his capture. He told a reporter that he was forced to skip the amnesty after he was "There is no money and there is no future for me in Indonesia."

Refugees with valid papers

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and Malaysian authorities "mistakenly" arrested about 20 people, mostly from Aceh, even though they were refugees with valid documents issued by the agency.

The UNHCR has urged the government not to deport migrants from unrest-struck areas of Aceh on compassionate grounds.

Malaysians blame rising urban crime on foreign workers, especially the illegal ones who are often dropped by their employers. *With reports from Jerome Aning, AFP, AP*

Village resident baffles House drugs probers

From page A1

shabu.

Rep. Rozzie Abian Jr., committee chair, and Representatives Rolilo Golez, Ace Barbers and Antonio Cuenco were grilled by Guzman's capacity to buy a home in the posh village.

Barbers noted that Guzman used to work as a factory worker in Tondo, Manila, before his employment at Philippine Amusement and Gaming Corp. from 1995 to 1998.

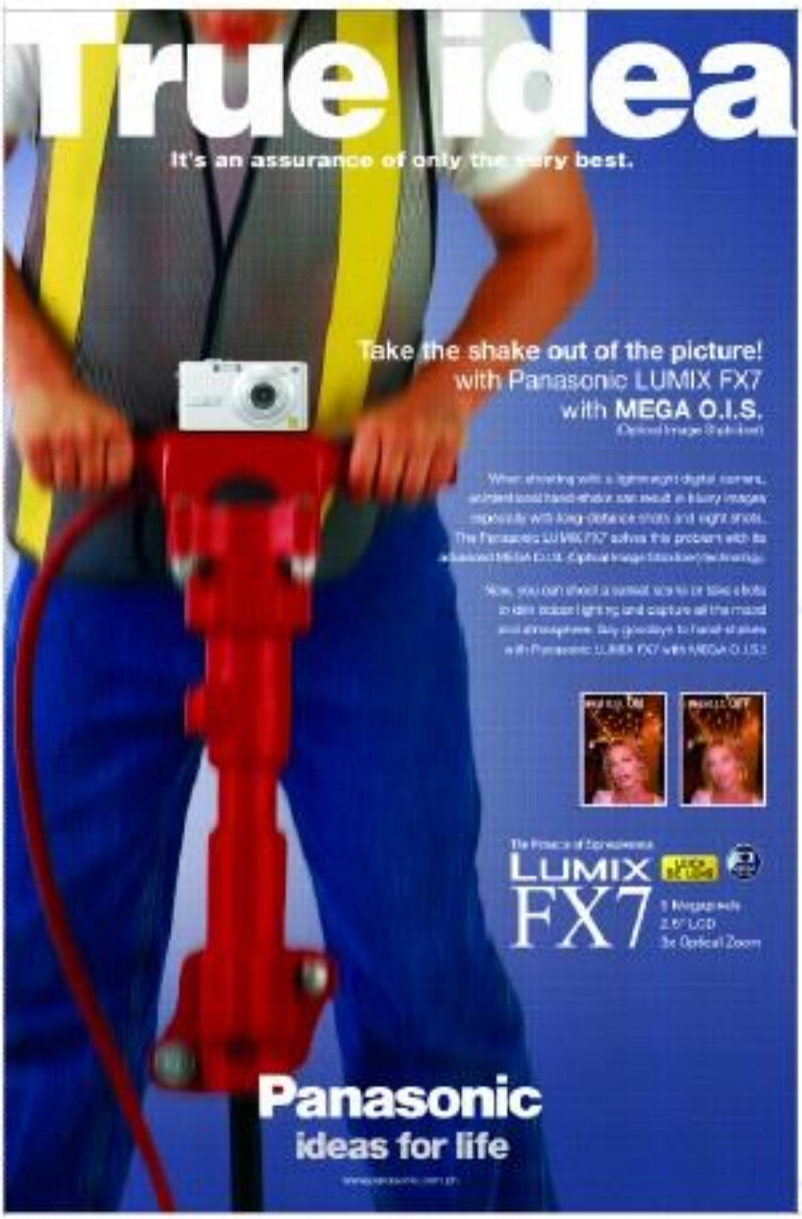
"It's questionable for the likes of Guzman to [be able to] buy property in the subdivision with his meager monthly income of [P8,000 to P10,000]," said Barbers.

When congressmen demanded answers, Guzman said he had been engaged in the construction business for about 10 years. When asked about his total assets, he invoked his right against self-incrimination.

Golez told reporters after the hearing that Guzman had a "questionable character" and was most likely "hiding something" because he had chosen to hide behind the constitutional protection similarly invoked before congressional inquiries by Major Generals Carlos Garcia and Jacinto Ligot, both charged with corruption.

He noted that Guzman even batted law enforcement agencies from taking custody of evidence seized during a raid on April 15, 2004.

Unable to extract sensible answers from Guzman, Abian ordered him to submit a copy of his individual tax return showing his real net worth. Guzman agreed to bring it the following day.



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KIDNAP CASE VS ROLDAN

Wang can't be state witness–PNP

KIDNAP suspect Jennifer Wang cannot be a state witness against purported boyfriend Jeanny Roldan, the ex-congressman who is a primary suspect in the kidnapping of a three-year-old boy in Pasig City last month, according to police director Reberto Dello.

Wang is considered one of the masterminds and outsiders not among the "most guilty," said Dello, the head of the Philippine National Police (PNP)-Criminal Investigation and Detection Group—"definitely strengthened our case."

Pagdanganan pointed to Roldan, Gerard and "a woman named Jeanny" as the masterminds of the kidnapping.

Roldan's lawyer, Salvador Panelo, maintained that his client was innocent and a victim of a frame-up.

He said he would be filing two petitions for habeas corpus on behalf of Roldan.

The lawyer of Wang meanwhile said the testimony of Pagdanganan implicating his client and a video allegedly showing her involvement in the abduction were not enough to prove Wang's guilt.

He said Pagdanganan's claim should be reviewed carefully since it comes from a suspect who wanted to clear his name from accusations that he was also involved in the kidnapping.

At the two other suspects being eyed as possible witnesses against Roldan, Dello said the justice department would have to evaluate their case.

Philippine National Police spokesperson Sr. Supt. Leopoldo Bataoil said the testimonies of the five suspects—Albert Pagdanganan and Gloria Garcia

The WORLD

Cito Lorenz B. Gozo

'People power' topples Lebanese gov't

THOUSANDS of protesters (left) wave Lebanese flags in central Beirut Monday during a rally against Lebanon's pro-Syrian government two weeks after the assassination of former premier Rafiq Hariri. Above, a protester offers roses to Lebanese security forces.

BEIRUT—The Lebanese capital exploded in rapturous cheers on Monday as tens of thousands of demonstrators hailed the "people power" that led to the downfall of the government in the face of unprecedented public protests.

Lebanon's pro-Syrian prime minister Omar Karameh resigned on Monday in the face of mass protests, bringing to a head a political crisis sparked by the murder two weeks ago of his predecessor Rafiq Hariri.

"I announce the resignation of the government over which I had the honor of presiding so that it does not pose an obstacle" to the probe into the killing, an emotional Karameh told parliament in a televised final plunge the country into new political turmoil.

The announcement was greeted with loud applause in the national assembly, where the opposition had been nothing a vote of no confidence in Karameh's four-month-old government.

In scenes reminiscent of the "orange revolution" in Ukraine, Beirut was a sea of red and white Lebanese flags as Karameh announced his resignation.

"For the first time, Lebanese public opinion has won," said Dr. Jawad Adduli, an MP with Hariri's political bloc.

Demonstrators who have been staging almost daily protests against the regime and its Syrian backers since Hariri's killing burst into boisterous applause as they watched Karameh's announcement on a giant television screen.

Fireworks and car horns greeted the news around the capital and in other towns as people hugged each other, shouting triumphantly "liar's resigned, he's resigned."

Tens of thousands of jubilant demonstrators gathered in a sea of red and white Lebanese flags at the nearby Martyrs' Square in central Beirut, broke into singing the national anthem.

"Karameh has fallen, your move will come, Lahoud, and yours, Bashar," the demonstrators chanted, referring to President Emile Lahoud and his Syrian counterpart Bashar al-Assad.

The crowd, estimated to number some 60,000, had defied a government ban on demonstrations and massed in the heart of Beirut as parliament held the debate on Hariri's murder in a huge Feb. 14 bomb blast.

But in stark contrast to the scenes of joy in the capital and in other cities, the mood was one of anger in Karameh's home town of Tripoli, 85 kilometers northeast of Beirut, where clashed traffic with burning tires and torn down opposition banners.

"With our blood, with our soul, we will defend you a Karameh," they chanted, along with deputy incoming leading opposition figure, the Druze MP Walid Jumblatt and visiting Shiite leader Hariri.

Making his announcement, Karameh said he was resigning even though the government had enough votes to win a confidence motion.

"In the oil political circumstances pressing the responsibility of this criminal murder on the government would be a step forward in the right direction," he said in an earlier session of the house before a recess.

Karameh's cabinet took office after Hariri, a close-time prime minister and billionaire businessman, resigned in October in a row over Syrian influence in his country.

The resignation came exactly two weeks after the assassination which triggered a wave of public opposition against the Lebanese government and its leaders in Damascus who are widely blamed for the murder.

Shouting "Syria out!" protesters descended on Martyrs' Square where Hariri is buried as hundreds of heavily armed troops and police guarded nearby streets and filled key points in the city.

Many spent Sunday night at the square despite the ban on protests coming into force. And shops, banks, schools and businesses were closed in Beirut and other major cities following a call by a general strike. AFP

A VIDEO image shows an Iraqi pointing an injured man on a stretcher in this Feb. 28 following a suicide car bomb attack on a crowd of people in the town of Hilla, south of Baghdad, which killed 125 people and wounded 130, the single deadliest attack since the fall of Saddam Hussein in April 2003. REUTERS

Bin Laden enlists top Iraq operative for US attacks

WASHINGTON—Osama bin Laden is enlisting his top operative in Iraq, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, to plan potential attacks on the United States, US intelligence indicates.

Al-Zarqawi, who rivals bin Laden as the nation's public enemy No. 1, has been involved in attacks in the Middle East but has not been known before to have set his sights on the US.

The homeland security department issued a classified bulletin to officials over the weekend about the intelligence, which spokesman Brian Roehrkasse described Monday as "credible but non-specific."

The intelligence was obtained over the past several weeks, officials said.

The FBI has no immediate plans to issue its national terror alert level, Roehrkasse said. However, the intelligence "reiterates the desire by al-Qaeda and its associates to target the homeland," he said.

Bin Laden sees a contest with al-Zarqawi within the past two months in an effort to outdo him in attacks, a US official said on condition of anonymity. The move may reflect that al-Qaeda leadership's desire to involve al-Zarqawi in operations outside Iraq, the official said.

Sources in Iraq, officials noted, have limited al-Zarqawi's ability to undertake attacks elsewhere.

Al-Zarqawi is blamed for scores of attacks in Iraq and pledged allegiance to Bin Laden's network. Al-Qaeda nevertheless has kept for he has had differences with Bin Laden, and his officers are considered somewhat distrustful from a critical Qaeda operations.

Another administration official with access to the Homeland Security Department's bulletin said the intelligence indicates that al-Qaeda has continued to encourage al-Zarqawi, who was born in Jordan, to get involved in terror actions against Americans outside of Iraq—including in the US.

"The intelligence continues to be analyzed by the intelligence community and appropriate officials will be passed on to homeland security partners," Roehrkasse said. "The department has no plans at this time to raise the threat level to the orange (high) category."

DHS and the bulletin to state-homeland security directors. A junior department official said the bill was not finished, and that the information that led to the bulletin was gleaned by the CIA intelligence.

Al-Zarqawi has a $25 million US bounty on his head and is believed to have orchestrated a wave of car bombings, kidnappings, assassinations and beheadings across Iraq. He has run an increasingly dangerous, but diffuse, network of operatives in Iraq known by a number of names. Al-Zarqawi is blamed largely for attacks in the Middle East, including coordinated attacks in Iraq and foiled plots targeting US and Israeli targets in Jordan at the millennium.

In October, he made a first-ever pledge of loyalty to Bin Laden, by posting a message on a website known for carrying militant Islamic statements. At the time, US officials believed al-Zarqawi was hoping to appeal to a larger audience and adopt Bin Laden's broad objective to attack the US. AP

Israel insists Syria to blame for Tel Aviv attack

JERUSALEM—Israel insisted Monday that Syria was to blame for a Tel Aviv suicide attack as a car packed with explosives was uncovered in the West Bank, ending a shadow over efforts to forge peace in the Middle East.

Stepping up the war of words against arch-foe Syria, Israeli intelligence briefed EU ambassadors on its efforts to prevent a repeat of Friday's bombing, claimed by militant group Islamic Jihad.

"We say Syria is responsible for allowing these organizations to have their headquarters there, their training camps there and to give them all the assistance that they're asking," foreign Minister Silvan Shalom said.

Syria, already under immense international pressure to withdraw its troops from Lebanon, has denied any connection with the triple-suicide bombing and insists Islamic Jihad's office in Damascus has closed.

Just three days after the Tel Aviv attack, Israeli troops discovered a car packed with explosives in the northern West Bank, raising yet another shadow over steps toward peace after more than four years of violence.

The military and the whole, found outside the village of Ibrahim —just far from the radical stronghold of Jenin—had been rigged by Islamic Jihad.

"The car was ready for use in an attack and it was apparently prepared by the group which carried out the suicide bomb in Tel Aviv," said a spokesperson.

The European Commission promptly called on Palestinians and Israelis to promote a new declaration of the peace process, as Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas said it would be worldnewsview a solution for peace talks.

"President Abbas must take effective steps to fight and dismantle terror organizations, stop incitement, and maintain law and order," said EU external relations chief Benita Ferrero-Waldner.

"(Israeli) Prime Minister (Ariel) Sharon needs to ease restrictions on freedom of movement. Both sides are taking risks for peace and need our support."

As the death toll from the Tel Aviv blast rose to five, the overall number of people killed since the September 2000 outbreak of the Palestinian uprising reached 4,741, including 3,602 Palestinians and 906 Israelis.

One dies out of a London countryside as Palestinian reform, Abbas insisted the Palestinians were "entering 100 percent effort" to end anti-Israeli violence.

"We have an opportunity and it would be irresponsible if not, the failure, or the world allow it to slip away," he was quoted as telling Britain's independent newspaper.

Israel has insisted there would be no progress in the peace process until the Palestinians crack down on militants, clamouring to halt the planned release of 900 prisoners in the aftermath of the bombing. AFP

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WORLDBRIEFS

Death toll in car blast hits 118

HILLA, Iraq — A suicide bomber killed 125 people and wounded 130 by detonating a car near police recruits in a crowded market south of Baghdad on Monday, the single bloodiest attack in Iraq since the fall of Saddam Hussein. The bomber blew himself up next to a line of recruits waiting at a health center to take an eye test so they could join the Iraqi police in the town of Hilla, 100 km south of Baghdad, witnesses said. Many of those killed were at the market across the road and were caught in the blast as they shopped in morning sunshine. Reuters television footage showed a piles of bloodied bodies outside the building. Smoke rose from the wreckage of burnt out market stalls as bystanders loaded mangled corpses on to rickety wooden carts, usually used to carry fruit and vegetables. Others, their bodies ripped to shreds, were piled into the back of pickup trucks. Bloody buildings were pockmarked by shrapnel. *Reuters*

Trials of Saddam officials set

BAGHDAD — Saddam Hussein's half-brother Barzan Ibrahim Hassan al-Tikriti, his former vice president Taha Yassin Ramadan and three others will face the first tribunals of the old regime hugs and for the crimes against humanity, an Iraqi special tribunal said Monday. The five men, handcuffed and escorted by police, were headed over by one before the court's chief investigative judge, who told them they would be tested for the 1982 killing of 143 residents of Dujail, a village northeast of Baghdad. They are accused of carrying out revenge murders after Dujail villagers allegedly fired at a presidential motorcade. The case, which can begin once that the court's formal investigation into the alleged crimes has been wrapped up, will not start for at least 45 days. AFP

US rebukes China's human rights record

WASHINGTON — The United States, in its annual human rights report released Monday, accused China of making shared, suppressing religious rights and restricting freedom of speech. "The government continued to commit numerous and serious abuses," said the 2004 report, which also said Beijing's cooperation and progress on human rights last year was "disappointing." The report said there were cases of wrongful killings, torture and mistreatment of prisoners. "The lack of due process was particularly egregious in death penalty cases, and the accused was often denied a meaningful appeal," it said. AFP

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 2, 2005
PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER
SPORTS

Chot cuts nat'l pool to just 21

By Jasmine W. Payo

THE LIST just got leaner. But national team coach Chot Reyes stressed that his search for 12 talented and dedicated players is far from over.

From the 32 players invited to the Philippine team, Reyes yesterday trimmed the lineup to 20 standouts from the Philippine Basketball Association and dropped its core players from the amateur ranks.

"This is no means the final list," said Reyes. "Those who were named can still play their way out of the pool and those who did not get to (make) it can make their way back in the team."

Leading the elite race is Barangay Ginebra's Eric Menk, who won the best Player of the Conference and Finals Most Valuable Player award in the PBA Philippine Cup.

The only amateur who made it to the list was Philippine Basketball League revelation Anthony Washington.

The rest were the superstars of the PBA, including crowd-pullers Jeaneo Seigle of San Miguel, Mercers Rivinda of FedEx, Mark Cardona of Barangay Ginebra and Tony de la Cruz of Shell.

Pivital guards Jimmy Alapag of Talk 'N Text, Mike Cortes of Alaska, Dondon Hontiveros of San Miguel and Jayjay Ilig of Purefoods made it to the short list, along with top big men Nic Belasco and Dorian Peña of San Miguel, honored Adkhcid of Barangay Ginebra and Darren Villanueva of Red Bull.

Also selected were Purefoods' hotby Rasmundo, Talk 'N Text's Sunny de Ocampo, and Alaska's Sonny Thoss.

Talk 'N Text's Willie Miller, Barangay Ginebra's Jayjay Helterbrand, Coca-Cola's Bull-Reyes and Sta. Lucia's Dennis Espino, the oldest player in it, was named as injured reserves.

"These are the most deserving injured players," he said. "Those players were injured in the line of duty. So it's not their fault, we cannot take it against them."

Rutherford injured his right calf in Game 5 of the semifinals, while Miller sprained a foot in Game 2 of the finals.

Jayjay and Dennis, meanwhile, have been suffering from nagging injuries.

Reyes added that there were several other players who "showed something we're looking for" such as John Arigo, Jun Mbala, Mark Telan, Ian Gamilla and Rich Alvarez. But he had to painstakingly narrow the list to those "who have a legitimate chance of making it to the final 12."

Reyes said that his main criteria was the players' "ability to work together and complement each other" and "the ability to play with in the system we envisioned for the team."

The 43-year-old mentor added that a player's attitude was another telling factor.

"No PBA players is already guaranteed that they're all very good," said Reyes. "So during the national team's practices, we looked at the intangibles—the players' reaction when they get hammered, who comes early, who stays behind, who's communicative with the coaching staff."

The national squad, which will see action in the Asian Basketball Confederation (ABC) Championship in Qatar this September, has an average height of 6-foot-3 and a median age of 26.

Reyes noted that the lineup with burliest Philippine Cagers considers Thomas Black, Tim Coone and Joey Eichhoz, and deputies Alvin Castro and Buddy Peña.

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MILLER. Part of injured reserves list

US editors favor Erik over Manny

Morales: Most important fight

By Edwin L. Lagumbay
Contributor

MORALES

It's a startling twist, a survey conducted among more than 1,000 boxing editors in the United States and Puerto Rico indicated on Erik Morales was over Manny Pacquiao in their monumental March 19 showdown in Las Vegas.

Morales, 30, and former world champ in three divisions, has been pegged the underdog in the Las Vegas bonding fines since the fight announcement in January.

The development lends credence to the prediction that odds would be even some fight time or the MGM Grand Hotel and Casino.

In fact, the vote among the editors was close with 54 choosing the Mexican and only 51 siding with Pacquiao.

One editor said it will be a draw.

Meanwhile, Morales has described his bout with Pacquiao at 30, as his "most important fight."

"Pacquiao is a soldier and I must for a very difficult, exciting combat," Morales told the Mexican media June his coming camp at the Grand Hotel Resorts in Mexico. "This is a fight to be remembered by fans."

Morales said he intends to make the fight a showcase of his talents and not that of his opponent.

Explained Morales: "Pacquiao is a wonder and a very good fight-

er... he's always going forward, applying pressure... the swing that punches. I think his speed is his greatest quality but like every fighter he's got weaknesses and I have to take advantage of those weaknesses."

"This fight will decide what my career will be and I feel like I still have a lot left," he added.

Morales also divulged his strategy: "We are going to have to control the rate of the fight and to make an intelligent fight. We know that he is strong and if there is a need to lose we will do it, but if there is a need to exchange blows, we will also do it."

Interestingly, Morales has not predicted a knockout in five years, calling Chat he is just working with much concentration and focus for this bout, as he fully knows the significance of the March 19 showdown.

"All fights are important, but there is no doubt that this one is much more important than all others," he said.

Asi's slot leans on PBA board

By Jasmine W. Payo

NATIONAL coach Chot Reyes will find it easier for the beleaguered Air Stallions in the Philippine team.

"It's a matter for the PBA board to decide if they will allow him to play, he will be in the international," said Reyes.

The 6-foot-9 cager was suspended by the league board on a Department of Justice ruling that he linked his relationship.

Eleven other foreign-born Filipino players made it to the 21-man roster of the team's national team that will compete in the Asian Basketball Confederation (ABC) championship in Qatar this September.

Leading the lineup is Olin Most Valuable Player Eric Menk, along with Jimmy Alapag, Jayjay Helterbrand, Mike Cortes, Dennis Peña, Rich Nuvio, Mike Cortez, Sunny Thoss and amateur standout Anthony Washington.

"The guidelines is very simple. If you contract play in the PBA, you cannot be in the pool," said Reyes. "So if there is a amateur who is not able to complete his papers and cannot play in the league, then he cannot play in the pool."

"Same goes with Washington," added Reyes. "Before he applies for the PBA draft, he must comply and complete all his requirements. If he's not able to do that, he's going to come off the list."

The PBA is now requiring foreign-born Filipino players to submit additional citizenship papers to be able to play in the PBA's Reinforced Conference.

The deadline of submission has been moved from March 4 to April 20.

Enrico welcomes RP five challenge

By Dennis U. Eroa

ENRICO Villanueva, who plays for Red Bull Barako, cemented his place among the league's list of elite players as he sustained the rigorous 30-day national team weekends under the close watch of head coach Chot Reyes.

Known as the fanging Bull of Philippine basketball, the 6-foot-5 Villanueva joined five other big men in the tournament list.

Villanueva, 24, was lifting weights at the Gold's Gym in Greenhills, Mukati City when he learned of Reyes' announcement.

"I promise to work harder. I welcome the challenge," said Villanueva.

The last time Villanueva donned the national colors was during the ABC under 18 championships in Malaysia, Indonesia in Taiwan, India.

Asked on CHAMPION Villanueva's match with his idols on primetime stance.

"Reyes are getting stronger and stronger. I need to stay more calmer than in order to conduct the hanging," Villanueva said.

Red Bull made an early exit in the recent Asia Shaker 2005 Philippine Cup, where Villanueva averaged 17.5 points and 9.4 rebounds.

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Canlubang, Southwoods keep starting units secret

BACOLOD City Mayor Evelio Leonardia hits the ceremonial tee.

By Mussing R. Carallo

MUNTINLUPA, Negros Occidental—Canlubang and Southwoods are playing their cards close to their chests, though it's obvious that they have the best hands in this edition of the Philippine Airlines Interclub.

Both squads refused to divulge the names of the players that will open their respective bids in the Championship Division of inter-club golf until the deadline to send only-when-due-date over-and-done is hit today.

The Expo Service and Southwoods fort contented on the Muntinlupa turf in Stanfield, even Pete Iliff vowed a scheduled at the Manila Invest here, just to avoid giving each other a hint of their starting lineups.

"All I can say is that we will be fielding a strong team (for Day 1)," said Canlubang team playing captain Long Yulo. "I'm juggling combinations in my mind. But we want to open up strong and start our bid right."

Del Monte is the defending champion, but with no homecourt advantage to speak of, the Bukidnon-based squad is hardly drawing attention.

"It will boil down to Southwoods and Canlubang for the title," said Southwoods' Jerry Divinagracia, seated just a few feet across Yulo. "Our lineups are pretty much even."

Del Monte captain Ryoung Woo, on the other hand, does not mince words. He's feeling premature about a matter of fact, and goes out his lineup for today consisting of Lino Belmonte, Rubuy Jamolin, Joel Ignacio, Cherbu Montilla and Jun Dela.

"We have proved (last year) that we can win it," Woo said. "Three courses are very similar to Del Monte, though Manila is the hardest of the lot."

Ben and Noel Marcos, Tristan Tabanas, Lourdes Dandan and Mike Arevalo also have Thursday at Wack-Wack.

Tournament format calls for each team to field five players for two days on 36 holes in all (inter-venues as much as possible). The consensus disqualifies a player to the individual championship for playing in only one venue.

And Pete could very well ask Jose Pagsanjan to sacrifice his individual aspirations again and play two days in Manila while Jun Ignacio like the back of his hands.

Pagsanjan, the consult's amateur ace, was a former long stayer on the pro-70 Senior. He played twice there in 2002, when Canlubang won the title in four straight titles that ended at the turn of the century.

Inclusions hole that Canlubang will ask Al Tampinco to play two rounds at the Muntinlupa. The former pangolf warning's former money hung on every fairway of the Gabby Silvestre-designed layout as he learned to play the game down.

Welcoat, Benilde unite for PBL

By Jeannine W. Pepe

THEY already have the experience, size and depth.

But the Welcoat Painthunters, runners-up in the Philippine Basketball League Open Championship, decided to boost their lineup with young talents from the De La Salle College of St. Benilde.

"This is a good situation for both partners," said Welcoat team owner Raymund Yu after signing an agreement with DLSCSB school officials led by president Bro. Armin Luistro on Monday night that will allow CSB players to join the squad.

"Welcoat will roughen up the Benilde players for the NCAA, while Benilde will provide us a steady supply of young players."

Welcoat assistant Cabby Trinidad also replaced Timothy Peters as head coach of the Painters.

The two-year partnership made Welcoat the fifth ballclub to adopt a collegiate team after Magnolia the Franchise, University ICTSI La Salle, Adidas Mobiliko-Ateneo and Toyota Otis Letran.

"Initially, there will be five Benilde players in our roster," added Yu. "The following season, at least half will be from Benilde."

Garcia named Mayor center Jay Espiel, point guard Paolo Oliveria and forward Carlo Manding as lineup picks.

"We wanted to change the pace of the team. We'll utilize run-and-gun," said Garcia, who also suited up for the Heaven Bees (1990 to 1999).

The Batmanners will still lose on Fernando Featherstone (wrecker Anthony Washington, JR Reyes, Eugene Tan and Ryan Ilo) when the PBL Unity Cup kicks off on April 2.

Welcoat, one of the dominant teams in the league, already won four titles in 14 championship appearances.

PEP RALLY: Free Dandoman Mike Arevalo and San Miguel president Ramon Ang join the national athletes for food and beverage conglomerate's lift back for the Southeast Asian Games. San Miguel will play godfather to 14 different sports associations.

SPORTSWATCH

Madera paces Palawan chess

Largahan 5-cock slims continues

Archers cop 2nd

BANGKOK—Filipino archers capped their spectacular showing in the 2005 1st Asian Grand Prix last Sunday by taking the women's team gold medal and the men's team bronze in the compound division at the Pramonk field here.

Led by triple-gold winner Alberto Pia, the Filipinas crushed India, 247 to 234, to cop their fifth gold medal on the memory. The other RP archers were Jennifer Chan and Josiah To being.

The men's team of Raul Amatosco, Adam Janssen Ili, Christian Cuellar (Bronze) and Jose Ledesma salvaged Hong Kong, 240-239, to settle for the bronze.

Pia Ili squad, which was sponsored by San Miguel Corp., PSC and the PA Foundation, finished second overall with five golds, one silver and two bronzes.

Tigers rebound; Admirals win anew

RP begins volley bid vs Macau

[illegible]

(CEBU CITY)—Host Philippines is confident enough not to worry too much about its opening match today in the 2006 FIVB World Men's Championship First Round Tournament Pool Asian C at the University of San Carlos gymnasium here.

But its 5 p.m. foe, Macau, has rounded into a seemingly better bunch.

RP head coach Sip Ilada said he is less worried over Macau, which burst advanced past the first round even as its best performance in this quadrennial event. Still, he cautioned the team to play hard.

And frankly, Macau had a little something to say about its participation here.

"We wouldn't be here if we don't give strong competition," said Macau coach Leong Weng Teng.

The Philippine starters are Mountain Gallo Jr., Cesael de los Santos, Glee Macalma, rookie Teagco, Edwin Mendiola and Renaissance Gregol. Other members are Jared de la Cruz, Jaclyn Dawayo, Jessie Almanzor Jr., Marco Hidalgo, Nelly de la Cruz and Jeffrey John Cruz Jose.

Rostered in the T-pos match are Tonga, playing in its first-ever international tournament, and reigning Southeast Asian Games champion Indonesia.

Philippine Volleyball Federation president Roger Basiwelo said the Philippines will face tough competition from Chinese-Taipei, which currently ranks No. 30 in the world, and Indonesia.

By Marc Anthony Reyes

DUMAGUETE CITY (via Cesano)—University of Santo Tomas finally broke into the win column with a hard-earned 82-72 victory over University of Perpetual Help-Jonelta System-Laguna yesterday even as other Metro Manila foes thrived in the National Students basketball championships here.

UST banked on Aga Daad to even their card at 1-1 in seniors Group A. Daad fired 22 points despite a recent knee affliction.

Southern City College-Dumaguete host UST Let Tondo.

Defending champion Philippine Maritime Institute led NCR elimination champ UPH-Cebu System, swept their way to the quarterfinals with identical 3-0 records in Group C and B, respectively.

PMI rolled over University of Northeast Philippines, 75-46, at the Bayawan City Gym some 120 kilometers from here, while UPH-Cebu broke the heart of the hometown crowd at the Lamberto Macias Gymnasium, downing Southwest Institute 71-59/52.

Silliman University pushed its second straight win at the expense of Southern City College-Dumaguete, 75-69, even as University of Baguio topped Angeles University Foundation, 86-77, and Pilot Bicgrou College-Bacolod thrashed Aquinas University-Legazpi, 98-70.

Kobe netters nip La Salle

[illegible] Gakuen University found the La Salle team a tough nut to crack in singles competition, but found enough muscles in the doubles to emerge victorious at the close of the Prince InterCollege Tennis Dual Meet on Sunday in the PCU courts in Paco, Dito, Paco.

Hanae Ushiyama beat Rhodi Hitoki, 6-2, 6-2; Ichi Ihei outlasted Mirada Estrada, 7-6 (9), 2-6, 8-5 (ten-); and Ralph Bonz outlasted Takashi Hirashiyachi, 6-2, 6-0, to give the Green Archers their win.

But Kobe Gakuen, the Japan Division II champion, scored behind Fuyuki Ogawa who survived Jhon de Guzman, 1-6, 6-3, 9-7, Shimpei Motegashi who defeated Pennie Abea, 6-1, 4-6, 6-3, and Shohei Hayashiya who beat Mark Bello, 6-4, 6-3.

The Japanese also dominated the doubles with Ogawa-Miyake beating Allen Jhay, 7-5, 6-2, Hayashiya-Ito/Gonzales over Elmer Tinio-De Guzman, 6-4, 6-1, 7-5, and Maeyama-Motegashi over Bernt Bolez, 6-3, 6-2.

"We'll be coming back to Japan successful, and certified that we've invested a lot playing a talented La Salle squad," said Coach Fortunato Jonaro III. Dean Tagpis and coach of Kobe Gakuen() for three years now.

Tanauan tilt up

CORONA

THE 1ST Tanauan Class Open Mayor's Cup, the country's biggest active duty tournament, start kicks off at 9 a.m. Friday at the Speaker Jose Leuel Memorial Gymnasium (Unit 2, Inch of City-Mall in Tanauan City, Batangas.

The two-day event offers a cash pot of P200,000, with the champion receiving P100,000 plus trophy. The second placer gets P40,000. And, P20,000, fourth, P15,000; fifth, P8,000; 6th-10th, P2,000 each; and 11th-20th, P1,000 each. "We are getting closer to the clash of the best three-ander of the country. We want the players and visitors to experience the hospitality of our city," said Tanauan City Mayor Alberto Corona.

For details, call (043) 778-6858 and 778-1155 or (09) [illegible] or ACES (Japan Manila) (0917-4015674 and 0918-6006811.

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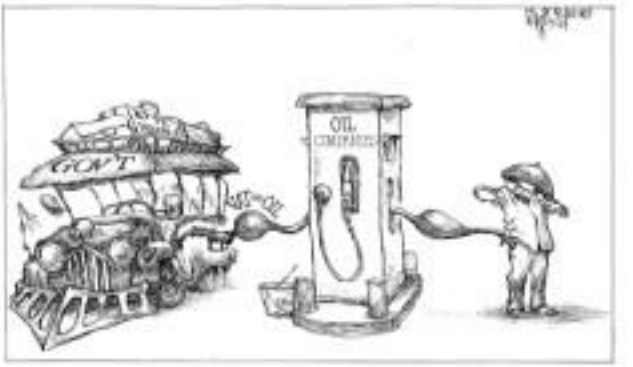


A world of their own

PERHAPS because she used to be a senator, President Macapagal Arroyo has always approached legislative liaison work with a light touch. On more than one occasion, she has downplayed the administration's difficulties in mustering the necessary votes in the houses of Congress, especially in the Senate, by pointing to the bottom line: At the end of the proverbial day, she gets the bills she needs passed anyway.

EDITORIAL Now she is not so blithe. On Monday, she used the occasion of a quarterly attended lunch she hosted in Malacañang marking the centennial of the Rotary Club of Manila to rebuke both Houses of Congress. Their offense: a continuing failure to pass the national budget.

The last time Congress passed a national budget, the President noted, was in 2008. But reenactment in 2009 is no longer an option. Another recession-era budget-wrangle is court disaster, principally because of the successive downgrades by international credit-rating agencies in the last two years. Reenactment, which automatically takes place when the proposed budget does not move legislative deadlines, would mean operating this year's programs with two-year-old assumptions: the surest sign that the government is running as fast as it can merely to stay in place.

The President said, pointedly, that she was "fighting for this budget to be passed this March because it will send a signal to our people and to investors that we're in control of our own future."

Congress, by implied contrast, was sending the wrong signal. "Those who oppose the national budget and the VAT [the proposed 20-percent increase in the value-added tax] will set this nation back and put us on a collision course with fiscal and economic responsibility," she said, drawing a graphic picture in black and white. "They will hold this entire country hostage to a future devoid of hope by putting petty politics ahead of the national good."

Hyperbole informs much of political rhetoric, and the President's second statement makes generous use of this characteristic figure of speech. Petty politics? A future devoid of hope? We detect a hint of panic creeping into the President's language. But this much at least is true: the Houses of Congress, especially the Senate, have been unmoved by urgency.

The two chambers have dutifully laid the blame for the delay at each other's doorsteps. But a revealing speech by opposition maverick Sen. Panfilo Lacson last Monday nevertheless our conviction that the Senate bears more of the blame.

Speaking before the Makati Business Club, Lacson disclosed that senators had "succeeded in removing P1.5 billion in intelligence funds from the executive branch ... [only to] channel the slashed funds to their pork barrel allocations."

There is no direct correlation between this legislative sleight of hand and the delay in the budget, but just the same it tells us all we need to know.

We have joined other advocates who have called for the scrapping of the pork barrel. We believe this is one of the most efficient ways to cut down on the national budget. Defenders have argued that, at about P28 billion, the pork barrel funds do not amount to much. They are wrong, of course; every single peso counts. They are also obtuse: if legislators give up their pork barrel allocations, the message of self-sacrifice joins power, literature compelling.

Various senators have rejected the appeal to scrap the pork barrel for various reasons, but if we were to venture a summary of their arguments, we would say what is common is precisely the lack of a sense of self-sacrifice.

The tone of budget deliberations in the Senate was set by the famously acerbic Sen. Joker Arroyo, who asked his fellow senators to pretend that agencies like Moody's Investor Service do not exist. We can sympathize with Arroyo, who is visibly cowed at the prospect of following, for worse, being seen to follow) the conditions of an international agency. But to pretend that independent risk evaluators do not exist, because they encroach on the privileges of the gentlemen of the upper chamber? Senators must be living in a world of their own.

Lacson's disclosures gives us additional proof that this is so. In spite of all the talk about the urgent need to trim the budget and get the economy going, our honorable senators have been caught playing games, of the pork barrel kind.

Logging ban will make building houses cheaper

(Continued from Monday)

WHAT my column last Monday was driving at is clear: the Philippines and all the Filipinos (not only the loggers) will earn more from our forests, if we preserve them by people to enjoy instead of cutting them so we are doing now. In the negotiations with the loggers, a reprieve in the taxes from the usual industry would in fact with a logging ban does not hold water.

Workers who lose their jobs falling trees would get better-paying and more honorable jobs in tourism and the government would get more in foreign exchange and in taxes. And the forests would remain there for decades and decades, assuming as we unwisely long after the loggers would have cut down with their last and the mountains have become bald and eroded and dense forests, trees mowed down. This is not conjecture. Other countries—Africa, the United States, Canada, Japan, for example—are reaping more from their forest and still maintain that they cannot close their own could have ensured had they not cut standing there.

The standing forest can feed pieces of wood would cure because our would have to impose our wood requirements. I think that is true yes, our forests are being denuded but wood is so cheap there does not are interested in its conservation. Why should they? Why should another useless cash crop for low cost wooden not house is enough to fully waste our small forests. Other countries that value their wood our personal ownership used for woodbuilding. Big Philippine companies can import lumber to do their own, others still some research wood.

Local furniture makers will use the imported hardwood trees for cheap furniture because we can still harvest trees from our forests. Other countries that have to import tropical hardwoods realize there very much smaller them only for very expensive furniture and houses.

Japan, which has extensive bamboo and pine forests, import wood even for their chopsticks. They only look at and enjoy their bamboo and pine forests because of ownership there, as the process owning more income from domestic and foreign tourists than what they spend for cutting wood.

Reputation wood and nature supplies would make eco-hunting more profitable and attractive. Those shrunken trees would become even taxes. Tree farming for wood is a profitable industry in Canada and the United States, which export their wood and paper products.

Even so, the world's construction industry is using less and less wood and using more and more concrete, steel and petrochemical substitutes. In the New England states in the US four Grams, a reporter in the quarter villages and took like they are made of wood but they are not. The chipboard walls look like planks of wood, sometimes steel-wood joists and which look like they are made of planks, nylon and other petrochemical substitutes. Floors and roofs with nice look like marble, brick, granite, cement and again wood, but they are really made of hard plastic. Bathroom units, complete with bathtubs, toilet, sink, etc. are molded to size plastic, also of the same materials, thanks to the US petrochemical industries, which raises the hypothetical oil refineries.

These materials have many advantages over wood. They are light, cheap, clean, do not are poisonous to termites and fungi, come in different colors so you don't have to paint them. They also cut the cost of a house very substantially. Builders to say they would be very excited in the Philippines where the cost of even a modest house is beyond the reach of many families. Also, they are the answer to volcanoes, fungi and dry rot that make clear work of wooden houses here. Did planned to put up a petrochemical plant in Davao to cut the dependence of the oil refineries has wood's save taken produce to make Well, these petrochem conservation materials I mentioned, if produced here, would revolutionize the construction industry.

Hand producers also see this legal loggers practice a "sustainable forest program" and reforest their concessions, this without them it legal loggers would decimate the remaining forests, and what a logging ban does not guarantee they will happen would.

"Sustainable development" is common than loggers have been espousing for decades. But the Forests keep disappearing and the mountains keep growing bald. Where is the sustainable forestry program there? Where are the reforestations?

The trouble with having timber concessions is that some concessionaires push on forests outside their concessions and then claim they logs are from their concessions. Only their concessions. It is difficult to distinguish between legal and illegal logs. But with a total logging ban, all my logs would be illegal, all essentially would have to be cleared because they would be so huge as one and therefore stolen! (the last logs or lumber) would be exported, paper virgin wood. Others also would be get the timber?

This should stop all logging and perhaps the remaining forests don't even have to be guarded. Because the everyone else anybody possessing timber would be caught and subject to arrest and we ensure can cure ban will prevent people from cutting forests trees.

Finally, the wood producers claim that logging was not responsible for the floods and landslides in Ormoc and Quezon. What a transparent lie. Please did all those coal logs be using the first of the mountains, the trees and the trees come from? Until legitimate, proclaimed all the forests to clearly that they looked like Ohio were cut with chainsaws?

AS I SEE IT

Neal H. Cruz

Trojan horse

THERE'S THE RUB

Conrado de Quiros

THEY are time—yes, love—bills pending in Congress attempting to stop what, to go by their sheer preponderance, they submit to be a resurgence of the land. Which is pornography. The bills range from the almost apologetic to the openly opprobrious. One is positively apologetic, involving the watch of God to kill us those human creatures that do not mind His glory.

Those bills are: HB 445, "prohibiting the publication of lewd photographs and art materials and articles to children and broadcasts;" by HER Janiera, HB 2838, creating a "local price and licensing board in all municipalities and cities to prevent the proliferation of indecent publications," by Bedon Antonino, HB 4274 "prohibiting the publication, sale or display, production, importation, and exhibition or public of indecent and sexual acts" by Representative Villarama, one of the proudest men, and would be president, Bible V; HB 2833, same or the last, by Edcel Rabaza and Alan Jesse Casimiro; and HB 2847, still same as the last, by Benjamin Magsaysay Jr.

Now, I don't know about you, but when we encounter "lewd" or "pornographic" in a kind of detail this defines makes you think there are those upon a penis dead of nose dwelling on it or are engaged in some kind of vivacious self-flagellation, preserving their foreskins and generally being pains-feasters for them. I say almost because then research assistants searching any chaos research in dark caves and selling getting acquaintances who escape them in a satirical mood. "Is out of impudence, pure."

But the bills are not seemingly sound thing that they are very trivial consequences. You can't afford as do men, a blithely I can appreciate how some painters might feel at having the lewd sensibilities of their children assailed by all its newspapers, TV and billboards that surround us. Or how some of the fathers of the impressions on the one they got launched into the world in. Though while at this, surely the lewd sensibilities of those children would be because

[illegible]

Clutching at golden straws

COMMENTARY

John J. Carroll, S.J.
Institute on Church and Social Issues

[illegible] financial crisis and to order downgrades, and its inability either to collect taxes already on the books or to impose new ones, the administration appears to be clutching at straws in the effort to keep itself and the nation afloat. Chief among these straws, it seems, is a revitalized mining industry. Be there is great reason to ask whether these golden straws will really keep the nation afloat, and how long a further drop.

Since the surprising ruling by the Supreme Court in declaring the Mining Act of 1995 constitutional and allowing 100 percent participation by foreign firms, Filipino firms have followed suit in their own rush to the mining of gold and copper, and especially lobbying before boards of their own. Moreover, in an effort to differ from based on past experience, government members at the recent international mining conference designed to attract foreign investors, as well as Filipino owners of the "new breed" of mining companies which the administration is promoting.

Likewise, prospected in this Manila press by the case of the Canadian mining firm TVI Pacific in Boston, Dambongan del Norte. Catherine Goodman, Ph.D., research coordinator of Mining Watch Canada, visited the area in October last year and wrote a detailed report, complete with numerous accounts and photographs, of totally unacceptable practices on the part of this company. The environment and livelihoods, manipulation of "community concerns," militarization, and unprovoked violence on the part of company guards. One wonders whether are the safeguards of which the President speaks, and whether indeed is the "responsible" new breed" of mining company.

With respect to the religious Jr. Mines in Rapids, director of the Mines and Geosciences Bureau (MGB), in a letter to the editor, listed those established in the Mining Act of 1995. The list is impressive indeed, but the question remains whether these safeguards are actually in place and whether the political will to carry out its mandates in this area.

Allow me to recall a privilege speech delivered in Congress by Akmad-nasir Sen. Edmundo G. Nasser, Jr. on March 16, 1995. In it he recounted how he had been asked the Mining Act to serve compiler from the Boac and Mogpog Rivers. The reports he received were totally unsatisfactory, and led to calls to suspend further the mining permit established or not. Eventually a group from the Ateneo de Manila did the study, and found that the copper levels in the Mogpog River were "forty times the acceptable standard. An inadequate technical report indeed.

On the matter of political will, one ought to first on the government's failure to control illegal logging despite its disastrous consequences and the fact that illegal loggers are usually persons in connection with well-endowed running firms. Of course, in the case of mining companies, the need to extract "more and faster" seems surprising it to stop decaying to talings into Calancan Bay; and since it managed to have the order overturned by the Office of the President. On the second occasion, the company suddenly found the mines declared "environmentally critical" and out of the question, which it had been supplying to the whole island. There is the kind of hard-boil which a company, especially perhaps a large foreign company, can play once it is established in an area and has a sufficient stake in the economy.

Now this means that the nation should abandon its natural resources to ensure isolated income in the earth? So indeed. But it ought be wise to work out with the government a politically economically and technically sound in such proper position to deal with the [illegible] of the mining industry. The minority will not go away, and is perhaps the last natural resource which this generation can bequeath to the next.

As a first step toward debunking political will, the government might insist that Mike Arroyo and Placer Dome rehabilitate the Boac and Mogpog Rivers, and compensate the fishermen for the damage done to Calancan Bay. Or it might restore the long forgotten criminal case against Placer Dome executives who were responsible for the Boac spill of 1996.

Equality and respect

AT LARGE

Nina Jiménez-David

A RECENT visitor to the country, under the auspices of the US Embassy was Dr. David Brown, a professor of political science and of law at Yale. As Yale University is where many of the country's top and rich children go to study, Brown was his reception to the United States and abroad.

Dr. Brown had been brought around to different universities in the country, including Silliman College in Dumaguete City, where I graduated. He gave a talk, to speak on "The global legacy of the civil rights movement," calling lessons learned from the struggle of African-Americans for equal rights and equal treatment under the law by countries and ethnic groups in other countries that think enough applies.

"The issues have changed," Dr. Brown told me in an interview after I asked if the American civil rights struggle still holds relevance to people in a place of 21 years. "There are issues to be addressed in global trade," he said, referring to the anti-globalization protests. Despite the skepticism of many Muslims, who don't have natural doubts about what an American academic could possibly tell them about Islam, Brown said that "separation is a threat to peaceful coexistence."

Dr. Brown's speaking tour has brought him to Malaysia and Indonesia as well as to Burma. He was scheduled to leave for Vietnam some days after our interview

LETTERS

Suspension or dismissal of corrupt officials is not enough

I AM a little bit disappointed with the ruling issued [illegible] 2/14/04, which commended the Office of the Ombudsman for its pending Deputy Governor Antonio Sandiganbayan for its inaction. Commissioner Reynaldo S. Nicolas ... We, at Bagong Makatarungan sa mga Manunanggol ng mga Mangagawang Pilipino Inc. (Manunanggol), view this suspension and the dismissal of corrupt government officials as a reward for these wicked people.

In the case of Nicolas, the Ombudsman has concrete evidence of his ill-gotten wealth. Why didn't the Ombudsman attach, as a preliminary course of action, his ill-gotten wealth as provided for under Section 11 par. 11 of Republic Act 6770 which created the Office of the Ombudsman? The Revised Penal Code has also a provision on the preliminary attachment of property broadly acquired.

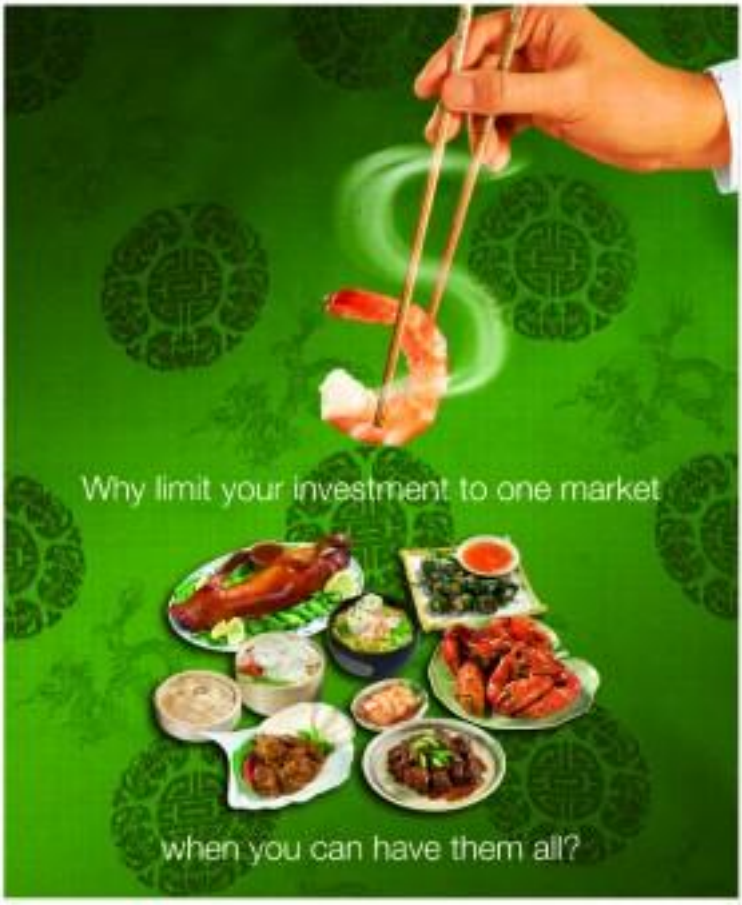
Another case in point is the case of Quezon official Manuel Valencia who was only dismissed from the service by Ombudsman Simeon Marcelo. So, the former enjoys his ill-gotten wealth up to now.

These two cases show that instead of discouraging graft-ers, the Office of the Ombudsman is encouraging the commission of graft and corruption. After all, ill-gotten wealth is not easily cured as being done in progressive countries like Finland, Hong Kong, Sweden, the United States, etc. Instead, the graft-ers are rewarded with early retirement with their best years for them and their families to enjoy.

As a delegate of the delegated list of the Philippines to a 1999 convention on Combating Corruption in Asian and Pacific countries, I was able to talk to an official of the International Commission Against Corruption (ICAC) of Hong Kong. He told me that confiscation of ill-gotten wealth is one of the effective weapons against graft-ers in Hong Kong. Why hasn't the Ombudsman adopt this method of the ICAC whose top cop-ed was invited by President Macapagal-Arroyo last year?

With due respect to the Office of the Ombudsman, we suspect that the current could be that some of its graft investigators and officials get to partake of the ill-gotten wealth.

—PROCOPIO S. BELTRAN JR., president, Bagumanunanggol ng mga Manunanggol ng mga Mangagawang Pilipino Inc. (Manunanggol), 816-834 Regina Bldg., Escolta, Manila



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Bohol's heritage safe with DPWH project

THIS is in response to the commentary "Grab-prone DPWH destroying Bohol heritage," (PDI, 1/7/04) How we to explain:

1. The project referred to by Inquirer-C Ubalon—wherein "one of the old houses in the church the DPWH wants to topple to make way for a highway"—is the Bohol Circumferential Road Improvement Project (BCRIP). It runs from Alburea to Tagbilaran City, then to Carmen. The road passes through a spot where the Baclayon ancient old Church and a number of antique houses are located.

2. In response to the petition/request of its dozen residents and in support of the above-stating the town of Baclayon a National Cultural Heritage, the project consultants decided to revise the project manner so that no house of precious heritage and priceless legacy will be demolished.

3. It has been agreed that not a single "antique" building will be touched during the construction. In a worse scenario, only the fence will be demolished to comply with the required width of the carriageway.

We assure all concerned that no heritage houses will be affected by the BCRIP.

—MARLENA S. ALVERO, assistant regional director for construction operations, Department of Public Works and Highways, Office of the Regional Director, Region 7, Cebu City

Illegal sirens

ON July 3, 2003, I saw an unmarked white Ford car cruising along Wilson Street, San Juan, with emergency police blinkers mounted on its roof.

Is it legal for civilian cars to use emergency blinkers? Allowing this practice poses a danger to innocent civilians, who can no longer distinguish between a real and a fake police. Moreover, the fake-outfits act like arsonists on the road when their illegal blinkers and sirens are turned on.

I have received so many civilian cars mounted with police blinkers. So many private motorcycles now have iconic imitating a mini police siren.

I think the media should use their influence to stamp out these illegal police blinkers and sirens.

—DIEGO CORONEL, Project 7, Quezon City

Question of the Week

Do you think the proposed national I.D. system will be useful in the fight against terrorism?

Senders of at least 20 texts as published in Tuesday's InqBox will each receive an "Inquirer Mug!"

Question of the Week

Do you believe former Congressman Dennis Roldan is involved in the kidnap for ransom of a 3-year-old Chinese-Filipino?

Senders of at least 20 texts as published in Tuesday's InqBox will each receive an "Inquirer Mug!"

E-mail: pr_provincial_news@inquirer.com.ph

INQUIRER Northern Luzon

Editor Jun Bautista
Bureau Chief Rolando B. Fernandez

'Adivay': Rediscovering Benguet in new festival

By Maurice Malanes
La Trinidad, Benguet

FOUR young women milled around an elder in gaining squatting inside a grass-thatched wooden hut on the grounds of the Benguet State University in La Trinidad, Benguet.

They asked Lolit Tano-ak, 73, how northern gas feels the traditional way in the upland town of Kibungan, 63 km north of the provincial capital of La Trinidad.

The woman, who turned out to be hearing students, were amazed when Tano-ak related how his wife delivered all her seven children at home with just the help of their neighbors.

They were all the more awed when he told them how Kankanaey folk would cut the umbilical cords of newborns using sharpened wild bamboos.

"When my wife would give birth, I immediately would take seven steps with traditional chores, such as getting food for and feeding the pigs. I also had to wash diapers on top of my head in the farm," Tano-ak told the students, who were carefully taking down notes.

Tano-ak joined a team of elders and officials led by Kibungan Mayor Murphy Pawyan that transported an antique traditional Kankanaey hut to La Trinidad for a new national trade fair-festival called "Adivay."

The 2.5-square-meter exhibition, at four-day Benguet's trade and cultural booth for the festival, which involved all the 13 Benguet towns. Each town also built a booth for its farm crops and crafts.

The morning students from a university in neighboring Baguio City drained open Tano-ak's among the thousands of people who came when the festival opened Feb. 22.

But the woman's were able to learn something about traditional birth delivery and parenthood from Tano-ak was something unique about the Adivay festival, whose theme was "Rediscovering Benguet."

Cultural education

"This [festival] is not only about discovering and rediscovering the products and crafts of Benguet. It is also about rediscovering and appreciating the various facets of the Benguet people's rich culture," said lawyer Eustaquio Bangguet Jr., festival co-chair.

From the Kibungan booth alone, a cultural education on culture has begun taking place. And Tano-ak, who doled expert in the giving instructions farmer about Kankanaey culture, became the "professor."

Surviving a bird's eye and a rat's tail on his mouth his cool composure, the elder thought he would just be sitting inside the hut to answer visitors and tourists to buy the town's display of assembled rice, ceramics, woven backpacks and bamboo baskets.

But he had to patiently answer the questions of visitors, "Why didn't you use nails in building this hut?" a young visitor asked, noting how the wooden frames of the hut were fastened through wooden pegs and how other parts of the roofing were tied using vines, rattan and bamboo strips.

3-story house

"By using just wooden bolts and vines, we can easily transfer our house," said Tano-ak, explaining how the Kankanaey, during earlier times, would transfer from one place to another as they left their upland residents farms fallow for a new upland farm.

Another group was amazed when Tano-ak described the community hut as a three-story house.

"The first floor (which is actually the ground under the elevated floor) is for chickens and pigs; the second floor (actually the elevated floor) is for us; and the third floor (which is some sort of a rooftop made of rattan) is for drying meats (carbonated rice)," the elder said, citing how the late Bapak Kabula, a respected Ibaloi elder, had described the traditional Kankanaey house.

At their booth, officials and elders of Kibungan have also been busy explaining to visitors the process involved in how their dried specimens were preserved.

In all the 13 booths, products and crafts were not the only elements of Adivay, which in Ibaloi means a gathering of people celebrating land's abundance.

Since Adivay also means a meeting of minds, the festival, which lasts until March 5, is an avenue for cultural education for those interested.

Baguio through the eyes of 'balikbayan' Japanese

By Elizabeth Lukegs
Contributor

ENGINEER Rudy Furuya is a fit, trim septuagenarian from Yokohama who feels reborn because for the first time in his long career as a commercial photographer, he is having his first exhibition and not in Japan but in the hometown of his heart, Baguio City.

DAYTOY TI AMIANAN

"A Dream of Baguio Through Peronsular Rudy Furuya's Eyes," a collection of color photographs, is on

FURUYA'S "Tawa Resting, Burnham Lake"

show at the Galerya Bonifacio of the University of the Philippines Baguio until March 12.

As the owner of the gallery are black and white shots of the city and the author's family taken by his father and uncle-assistant in the 1930s. They are mounted on a low platform like a dialogue of the way they were and the way things are now.

Born in 1935 at the Notre Dame Hospital in the mountain city, Furuya had among his first words, Gen, Ibaloi-Igorot for rice and Mama, old family friends. Pilipo Dakilo Elias Amyo and Shinsenjo Furuya got married, Agustinian-recollect there in honeymoon in Hawaii, Cavite. The men running the hospital were not priests when they saw the 500 rooms the nuns.

The general declared that since the emperor of Japan wanted to have a son to continue the line of succession, the Furuya boy should have both Japanese and Filipino names. He chose Rudolfo Francis, but since it was too long, it was shortened to Rudy.

Furuya considered his childhood pure bliss. Free time was spent playing with dogs, pony, rambles, and the games epic and iconic histories of pioneers and japanese lore with Igorot boys.

This sharpened his fluency in the Ibaloi language. At home, Japanese was spoken. He and his playmates made Bontoian Park their swinging grounds, and sometimes they ran around the public market.

Storybook Baguio

In what would only be described as something happening in a self storybook Baguio, he walked around the city, picking strawberries and fallen fruits and eating them.

His family enjoyed a middle-class life, his father being the manager of the Japanese Benzon's Pine Studio on Session Road. The idyll ended when they were rounded up by the US military in Klangan, Ifugao, where they fled during the war, and were eventually sent to Japan.

Regarding his repatriation, Furuya said through translator Marie Dolores Ipinaka Ignako, "I was half happy because the war had ended and we would go to the country of my father. I was half sad because I thought I would not be able to remember my birthplace anymore."

He continued, "When we went back to Japan, we were so poor—for life was difficult. We suffered so much, unlike in Baguio where we were comfortable. Maybe you'll find it funny but whenever I am asked in Japan where I was born, I always answer, 'In Baguio in the Philippines,' because I consider Baguio my hometown, not Japan.

"After the war, although the prospect of returning to Baguio remained dim, the more I felt nostalgic. Whenever I dreamt, I always dreamt of Baguio. As I grew older, the more I felt my love for Baguio growing. If I had been born in Manchuria or Manila, I wouldn't think of Ifugao so much, but it remained ever beautified and wonderful in my mind."

Across the NATION

More kidnappings thwarted, Army says

COTABATO CITY—The military yesterday said it had thwarted kidnapping attempts against 11 prominent personalities and Filipino-Chinese traders in Tacurong City and Koronadal South Cotabato when it clashed with suspected Pentagon gunmen in Maguindanao on Monday.

At least five Pentagon suspects, including two sub-commanders of Isnilon Hapilon leader Khoms Talab, died in the clash that occurred in Barangay Midpandakan in Sultan sa Barongis town.

Soldiers also recovered three high-powered firearms, including two rocket-propelled grenade launchers.

Col. Corey Juliandoni, commander of the Army's 604th Infantry Brigade, said the Pentagon, which figured in various high profile kidnappings in Central Mindanao, packs of the Armscomando Regino and the Commando Peralosada, was again planning to snatch wealthy individuals for ransom.

"We hit them even before they could hit our innocent traders," he said.

Quoting intelligence reports, Lt. Col. Alexander Macario, chief of the Army's 65th Infantry Battalion, said the "terrorist-like" gang members were re-grouping in the marshland and were planning to strike at unsuspecting Filipino-Chinese traders.

Despite the "victory," the military said those who are most likely to be abducted should "intensify extra measures."

The military also credited the Moro Islamic Liberation Front "who gave us the way" to the kidnappers' location in the marshland for the success of the operation.

The MILF is currently talking peace with the government.

Eid Kabalu, MILF spokesperson, said the MILF leadership considers stated by the "coordinated" of the military.

"Unlike in previous military operations where the MILF ground troops were not informed, this one went very smooth," he said.

In previous military operations against the Pentagon, soldiers have always clashed with MILF rebels.

In Lanao del Sur, military authorities said kidnap victim Bagobo Clemente, a government official and water management expert, might be handed over to the Pentagon gang.

Clemente was seized on Valentines Day in Lanao del Sur by "amateur kidnappers," according to Lt. Col. Buenaventura Dolorfino, Task Force Ranao commander. Edwin Fernandez and Charlie Getiano, *PDI Mindanao bureau*

Negros local execs ready to declare tourism chief 'persona non grata'

By Ronny E. Arnaudo
PDI Visayas Bureau

DUMAGUETE CITY—Some local officials are preparing to declare Tourism Secretary Joseph Ace Durano persona non grata for marketing Pamplona and the province **hour the promotion of the "I love Philippines, Maybe No," campaign.**

Vice Governor Jose Baldado told the business that he was willing to **sponsor a resolution to declare Du**rano unwelcome in the province.

He said his colleagues in the provincial board were "very vocal" about the issue because they felt Durano was snubbing Negros Oriental following its exclusion from the Department of Tourism's marketing drive to invite domestic tourists and holidaymakers to go travel in the country.

Baldado was supposed to bring up his resolution during the session on Feb. 24 but it did not push through due to the many important matters that were discussed by the legislative body at that time.

But he said the move might be pushed next session.

Durano earlier explained that some provinces were excluded from the promotion of "I love Philippines, Maybe No," because they lacked the facilities to cater to the needs of tourists.

If the DOT would promote these provinces, he added, tourists would later discover that they could not be accommodated due to lack of facilities and would have blame the tourism department.

Without naming names, Durano said the DOT was now helping three "unprepared provinces" to develop their areas so not to destinations.

But Negros Oriental Gov. George Arnaiz said Durano's explanation was "unfair" and "without basis."

He said Negros Occidental has aggressively promoted its tourism industry despite the lack of support from the DOT.

In fact, he added, the number of tourists coming in to the province has been growing. He, however, did not give figures of tourist arrivals in Negros Oriental.

COLOR PARADE
A parade of colors fills the streets of Baguio City during its celebration of the Panagbenga festival which drew thousands of local and foreign visitors in the wake of a morning encounta scare that gripped the country's summer capital.

Sugar planters seek GMA help for loans

By Carla P. Gomez
PDI Visayas Bureau

BACOLOD CITY—The Philippine Sugar Alliance (PSA) will ask President Macapagal-Arroyo to endorse their bid for an P6-P7-billion loan from the Land Bank of the Philippines needed to set up a clearinghouse that will market their sugar to ensure stable milligate prices.

Manuel Lamata, president of the United Sugar Producers Federation of the Philippines (Unifed), said the PSA and Sugar Regulatory Administration Junior Ledesma will ask the President to talk to the GSP to give them [needed financing.

Question is a document issued by a sugar mill, attesting to the amount of sugar that the producer has in the mill.

The PSA is composed of four sugar federations—the Unifed, the National Federation of Sugarcane Planters (NFSP), Confederation of Sugar Producers (Confed) and Davao Federation (Davaplus).

Mr. Arroyo is set to arrive in Negros Occidental today to visit a Gawad Kalinga housing project for agrarian reform beneficiaries in Hacienda Nenedito, La Carlota City, and to distribute Cyrill, cairo of Land Ownership Award.

In the meeting, she is set to meet with the sugar leaders in Bacolod City to discuss to their concerns.

Luis Lorenzo, Junior President Adviser for Asia Generation and Land Bank chair, encouraged Negros sugar industry leaders to make a direct appeal to the President to take up their cause of setting up a sugar marketing facility.

"I urge you to make it close to the President that the growth of the sugar industry and the upliftment of sugar workers have a direct impact on the **fulfillment of her 10-point agenda,"** said Lorenzo in his letter to the local **sacred the four sugar federations.**

In November, the Negros sugar **producers had asked Lorenzo, then** chair of the Land Bank, for a loan that would fund the creation of a sugar marketing facility that would ensure reasonable prices of sugar, free from the control of traders.

At the time, sugar prices had been plunging and sugar producers partly blamed this on price manipulation by traders.

In exchange, Lorenzo asked the producers to adopt a system of social amelioration where a percentage of revenue from the buying and selling of sugar through the sugar marketing arm would fund the upliftment of the poor through Gawad Kalinga.

Bride drowns as wedding party turns into tragedy

CEBU CITY—It was supposed to be a beach party to celebrate the forthcoming wedding of a relative to an Australian. But the merrymaking ended in tragedy when two siblings drowned, including the bride.

Myrna Solina, 28 and her brother Adriano, 18, died upon reaching the Isidro Montane Memorial Hospital in Argao town, about 60 km south of here.

Another sibling, Mariteres, 30, was brought to the Vicente Sotto Memorial Medical Center here after the nearly drowned.

The Solina siblings and their relatives were at the Mahaayhay Beach in Barangay Poblacion, Argao on Sunday to celebrate Mercelle's wedding to an Australian in San Fernando town, Cebu on Monday.

Mahaayhay Beach is a resort developed by the Argao municipal government but its management has been turned over to the Argao Development Multi-purpose Cooperative (Admico).

PO3 Arnold Ebenio of the Argao Police station said Myrna and Mariteres were swimming in the northern portion of the beach when they suddenly shouted for help.

Adriano, who heard them shouting, immediately responded, but he and Myrna were swept by the strong current and drowned.

Mariteres was rescued when she was rescued. She was given first aid before she was brought to the hospital, said Feliciano barangay captain Arnel de la Cruz.

De la Cruz, chair of the Admico, dismissed allegations that lifeguards had been remiss in their duties, saying they apprehended the rescue operations. *Shannon Papasikaan, PDI Visayas Bureau*

ARMM teachers threaten to hold 'sit-down' strike

COTABATO CITY—Public school teachers in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) vowed to hold a six-hour strike nextday to protest the inability of education officials to hold their Government Service Insurance System (GSIS) premiums.

They also threatened not to perform poll duties in the ARMM elections scheduled on May 10 this year.

Sultan Benjamin, head of the 18,000-strong education and high school teachers in this ARMM, said for several months now, the teachers have been deprived of their loan privileges and collect backfat from the GSIS.

HUSSIN

Benjamin, Director Ajuraj Hapili and Edward Pete, both Deputy ARMM officials, are now in Manila to follow up the teachers' complaint before the House of Representatives.

They passed Resolution 534 directing the House committee on good governance to investigate Deputy ARMM's failure to remit premiums and contribution to GSIS and other financial institutions.

The resolution was authored by party-list Representatives Mario Aguja, Rosita Ana Rosales and Ana Teresia Hontiveros and co-authored by 56 other lawmakers.

Lawmakers wanted to find out where the teachers' premium and contributions were when these are automatically deducted from their pay, according to Benjamin.

The resolution also sought to pinpoint responsibility for the mess.

"We are puzzled why until now this problem remains unsolved," Benjamin said.

But ARMM Gov. Datuk Hussin, the Deputy ARMM regional secretary in concurrent capacity said steps have been taken to address the problem.

He said when he assumed office, the problem was already there.

"Interest charges are imposed on delayed remittances so the obligation kept growing with Deputy ARMM's obligation to the GSIS following," he said. *Edwin Fernandez, PDI Mindanao Bureau*

Girl, 3, dies in NPA attack on Army post

CALAMBA CITY—A three-year-old girl was killed while her mother and a policeman were wounded as the New People's Army (NPA) ambushed a military detachment in a mountainous village in Bay, Laguna, Sunday night.

Col. Raymundo Ramoneda, officer-in-charge of the Philippine Army's 202nd Infantry Brigade, identified the victim as Shelyn Severino, daughter of Rolando Severino, a member of the Citizens' Armed Forces Geographical Unit (CAFGU) assigned in the area.

He said the territory secretary, Lipayo, and Calipa member Carlo Cruz were also injured in the attack, which happened at around 8 p.m. in the Army's detachment in Barangay Pansol.

Ramoneda said a certain Jesus "Ka Bahot" Batrizo and his five of the NPAs Dionisio Amoad Command led 15 other rebels in the attack on the military post. *Marlon Ramos, PDI Southern Luzon Bureau*

2 soldiers recovering after ambush by NPAs

ORIQUIETA, CITY—Two soldiers were declared in a safe condition after suffering from bullet injuries in some 15 New People's Army (NPA) guerrillas ambushed a military convoy in Barangay Mandong of Impasug-Ong last Monday.

Pvt. Armando Pable and a certain Pfc. Tadiado are now recuperating at the Misamis Occidental Provincial Hospital here where they were rushed for treatment after the attack.

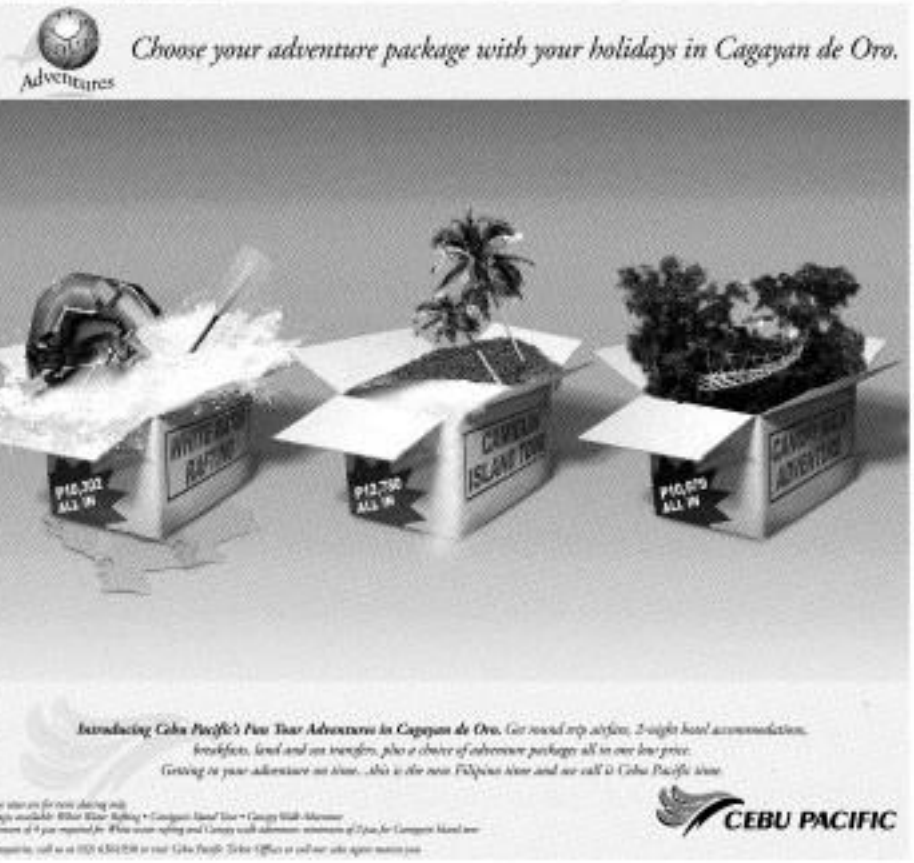
Two other companions, Lt. Abiel Angeles and Lt. Jocrisdon Jandilan, were killed.

Interviewed over radio station dxKO in Dumaguete City, Lt. Col. Raymundo de los Santos, deputy brigade commander of the Philippine Army's 10th Brigade, said the soldiers were unloading their rice downtown when the NPA rebels fired at them.

De los Santos said that based on reports from the field commander, the guerrillas were incensed by the soldiers on the outside underneath a thicket, indicating there could have been a tip-off of their movement when they left their post in Barangay Upper Bonbon uphill from the ambush scene.

The site of the ambush is about three kilometers from the town's village center, said De los Santos.

Speaking over mobile phone, rebel spokesperson Jaime Mateo said the ambush lasted for about 30 minutes after which the guerrillas fractured the jeep. *Ryan Rosauro and Hermon de la Cruz, PDI Mindanao Bureau*



Pray for Pope, don't speculate on successor, Catholics told

Front page ref

"This is one of the most futile things they can do. The succession of Peter is the concern of Christ. It is none of our business," he said.

The times call for prayers for the ailing Pontiff, the archbishop of Lingayen-Dagupan added in a statement.

Cruz sounded irritated that many time a Pope was sick, the world would conjecture without fail about his possible successor.

"It has been like this for almost 2,000 years. It is still the same during these times," he said.

At the Vatican, a papal spokesperson said Tuesday that John Paul II's condition was improving as the 84-year-old leader of the world's more than one billion Roman Catholics continued his voice exercises following last week's surgery to ease his latest breathing crisis.

He has also started speaking again.

"The Holy Father spoke to me in German and Italian. He was very alert. He will be speaking on some of the documents that I brought to him," said Cardinal Joseph Tobinger, the guardian of Roman Catholic doctrine.

Vatican spokesperson Joaquin Navarro-Valls told reporters the Pope "spent a good night" in the hospital and was preparing to consolidate Mass in his suite on the 10th floor of Rome's Gemelli Polyclinic.

'Bigger than life'

In his assessment, Cruz said John Paul II "is truly bigger than life, a great star of Christ, a true man of God ... a loving father to the whole of humanity."

Cruz added: "But while the whole Catholic world prays for him, there are now some people here and there, who would rather speculate, rationalize and even park his successor. While God has the Holy Father and the Church in his providential palm, there are certain norms of society who presume to make predictions as to who should take his place and what would happen in the Church."

Cruz said that never was there a time in the history of the Church when the Catholic faithful were asked "to make polls, survey and the like as to who will be the pope."

1-way ticket never used

The archbishop cited a saying that "the who enters the conclave a Pope, comes out the red cardinal."

"This simply means when the conclave of cardinals convenes to elect the successor of Peter, the cardinal proclaimed elected becomes pope hence the conclave still a cardinal, not the pope," he said.

Cruz said that before he was elected Pope, John Paul II was practically an unknown Polish cardinal.

"He went to Rome for the conclave of cardinals with a one-way plane ticket to Poland. His ticket was not used. The rest is history," he said.

Fragile

Throat specialists said parents like John Paul II should be able to speak normally again, although not as loudly.

John Paul II's recovery is complicated by Parkinson's disease, a degenerative neurologic disorder.

Parkinson's specialists said the debilitating neurological disease might well figure in more breathing crises for the Pontiff.

"We are in a stage where it's evident that the patient is fragile because of pressures of a disease with a 15, 20-year history," said Giovanni Fabbrini, a neurologist at Rome's Umberto I Polyclinic.

Anguished flock

The Vatican hasn't said if the initial aide inserted during the tracheotomy would be removed.

Leaving in the tube would give John Paul II "a security valve," said Alfredo Orsenigo, a throat specialist in Rome. "The moment he starts having problems all he has to do is take off the cap, and the Pope can breathe again through the tube."

Deeply moved by his health crisis, John Paul II's anguished flock is suffering alongside its stricken shepherd.

Around the world, the Catholic faithful are sending letters, e-mails and telegrams to John Paul II and organizing 24-hour prayer vigils. Spiritually and mentally, experts say, the society is making a call on believers as it would for anyone fretting over the fate of a hospitalized loved one.

Even Hollywood takes pause

"What we hope is that for Catholics, a Pope is 'papa'—father—and as a result empathy feelings that would ordinarily be directed to a family member," said Dr. Charles Gendreau, a US professor of clinical psychiatry.

Non-Catholics, too, have been saddened by the plight of the Pope.

John Woo: It has reached out to Orthodox Christians, Jews, Muslims and Hindus over his 26-year papacy.

Actor Emilio Estevez Martin Sheen summed up the feeling: "He is a bit like everyone's grandfather. We don't want to imagine the worst."

Even the organizers of the Oscars said they had considered toning down the annual awards bash had the Pope died, underscoring how the Pontiff's plight has given even Hollywood pause. With AFAPP and Reuters wires

Don't force your sons to enter priesthood

Front page ref

priests even if there are only 7,466 of them left to tend to at least 70 million Filipino Catholics as of 2003, he told reporters.

"Christ would never allow His Church to run out of priests," he said.

Still, the situation underscores a crucial reality: Many Filipino priests did not want to become one; only their parents did.

Cruz said one of the "very fundamental" warnings to "pious parents" is to never push their sons if it was not the latter who first expressed the wish to enter the seminary.

He noted that some parents would force their sons to become a priest simply because they did not want to be embarrassed in community that had such expectations.

What parents should know is that the "moral pressure" they exert will only make their sons go "wayward," Cruz said.

Instead, it's better for parents to actually object to a son's desire to become a priest because this will test his resolve and may even inspire him to proceed with the calling, the archbishop said.

He cited his own experience: "In my case, my parents objected. My father did not talk to me for two years. My mother was visiting me surreptitiously. Maybe that's why I was able to [make it] ... someone was objecting."

Starting a family

But pastoral pressure is not solely to blame for the decision of certain priests to quit, Cruz said.

Some of them want to start their own families, he said, adding that he usually tried to be of help as long as their cases were "meritorious."

For example, Cruz said, a priest wanting to marry would "really be helped by dispensation, by being able to live his married life for the good of the woman and the children.

"There are the ones that I really want to help ... those who already have a family with children, and who want to receive the sacrament of reconciliation," he said.

'Instructor delegate'

Cruz is an expert in canon law and an "instructor delegate," or one who handles the cases of priests wanting to quit. As such, he collects all the necessary documents for the Vatican's perusal.

A dispensation case usually takes two to three years to resolve, he said. Most of the 13 cases currently on his table were carried over from last year.

Fortunately for priests in anguish, he cited, one reckoning for him a "BIG percent hearing average."

How does a priest get dispensation?

Tough luck

"You have to prove that the person should not have been ordained a priest from the very beginning," Cruz said. "He should not have been ordained for many reasons—for was not really free to, he did not take it seriously or he was not emotionally fit for a priest's life and ministry."

But what if the bishop has rejected a priest's request for dispensation?

Tough luck. "Let the good Lord take care of him," Cruz said.

Surprise! Senate OKs national budget

From page A1

adoption of the budget bill to the House.

"Now that we have adopted the House version, we don't need a bicameral conference, and the President can now sign the budget," Sen. Manuel Villar, chair of the Senate finance committee, said.

20 affirmative votes

Opposition senators joined the Senate majority in delivering a unanimous 20 affirmative votes in favor of adopting the House version just a day after the President urged legislators, who were not passing the budget and the value-added tax bills, not to hold the nation hostage to petty politics.

The Senate earlier approved a national budget P240 million lower than the House version.

"The Senate today took the unprecedented and historic move of approving without any amendment House Bill No. 3154 or the [proposed] General Appropriations Act of 2005 by a vote of 20 affirmative votes, no negative votes and no abstention," Drilon said.

Absent senators

Only three senators—Miriam Santiago, Pia Cayetano and Jamby Madrigal—were absent when the chamber voted on the budget bill.

Drilon said the approved bill was the same as the one submitted by Ms Arroyo to Congress.

"The Senate feels that the continued uncertainty arising from the failure to enact a new budget is not doing the country any good," he said, adding that the country had been operating on a 2003-level budget.

"The budget is the financial roadmap of the country and a reenacted budget does not augur well for the country," Drilon said.

Drilon said the Senate move should not be seen as bowing to pressure from the President.

He said the administration and opposition senators merely set aside partisan interests to uphold the national good.

Villar said the adoption was in response to the President's call. "She called on us to speed up the passage of the budget and this is a response to her call as well as to the call of our people. We took heed of the people so that we can advance," he said.

Villar said he had broached the idea of adopting the House version to senators in the past weeks.

No pork for Lacson, Drilon, Lim

The Senate went into caucus early last night after Sen. Juan Ponce Enrile complained that nothing was happening to important bills.

The senators made the decision during the caucus and later voted unanimously to adopt the House version.

Sen. Panfilo Lacson asked the Senate to tell the President not to release the P240-million pork barrel allocated to him, Drilon and Sen. Alfredo Lim who all had decided to forego the pork barrel.

Drilon said this should reduce the yearend budget deficit by P360 million. The amount represents the total unreleased pork barrel of the three senators.

He said Sen. Juan Flavier also reiterated during the caucus his desire not to avail himself of half of his pork barrel.

Act of statesmanship

Opposition Sen. Edgardo Angara described the vote as an "act of statesmanship" for the country's stability.

"A reenacted budget in effect made the whole budget a big, big pork barrel because the projects and programs already funded under that budget would have been substantially completed, and the money would have been released as savings," he said after the vote.

"As you know savings can be reshuffled and re-aligned under the Constitution, and would have given the executive ... a huge pork barrel fund," he added.

Enrile said it was in the "primordial national interest" of Congress to pass a new budget.

"I think the people are entitled to some stability in the financial operations of the government. We can no longer take for granted our fiscal position and budgetary needs. We must show our people that we are a responsible Congress," he said.

Dangerous

Sen. Jinggoy Estrada said he voted for the adoption of the House version because a reenacted budget was "disastrous" for the nation.

"Reenacting the same budget for the third straight time is very dangerous. I don't want to be cowed by the House," Sen. Luisa "Loi" Ejercito said.

By agreeing to approve the budget, Senate Minority Leader Aquilino Pimentel Jr. said the senators had proven to Ms Arroyo that "we are committed to set our economic house in order.

"This is the first priority legislation that we need to pass over and above all the other tax measures that the President is now pushing this chamber to enact," he stressed.

Pimentel added: "This is an extraordinary act of the chamber in response to extraordinary demands of the times."

"This means that we have given the President, the chief executive officer of our country, the strength that she needs in order to address all these difficulties that we are encountering," Sen. Ramon Magsaysay Jr. said.

'Wise, old men'

"The Filipino people are crying out for results and the government is being called upon to produce results in the area of meaningful reforms," Senate Majority Leader Francis Pangilinan said.

Sen. Rodolfo Biazon said he wanted to vote against the measure but had to "bow to the collective wisdom of this chamber," saying that the senators were not called "wise, old men" for nothing.

"I do hope it will be understood that this is being taken because of a crisis situation," he said.

DRILON: Palace "pleasantly surprised" by the development.

'Selective logging like haircuts for bald men'

Front page A1

its identified rush areas as the Caraga region and Davao.

Furniture makers worried

He said this would be enough to supply the local wood requirements, pegged at three million cubic meters a year.

But this policy direction does not sit well with the Chamber of Furniture Industries of the Philippines (CFIP).

More than the availability of wood for production, the group yesterday said it was worried that the proposed scheme would raise the transportation cost of raw materials and end products.

CFIP executive director Marlyn Mapa urged the DENR to carefully study all aspects of the plan, particularly the identification of the regions that would be open for logging.

"Will the transportation of products be facilitated by the government or hampered by this new scheme? Will we have a more difficult time in the production process?" Mapa said yesterday in a phone interview.

"They should really think this through," she said.

Giant leap

Zobel's supposed that the DENR allow logging in forest plantations, but not in natural-growth forests.

"Instead of implementing a logging policy with loopholes a logging ban can pass through, the DENR [should] observe the rule in sustainable two-cutting—find trees planted by man you can use, but trees planted by God you cannot," he said.

Senior bishop, the lawmaker lauded Defensor's decision to "tighten" logging operations.

He said this was a "giant leap" from the previous policy of allowing logging under "misleading euphemisms which at first sound good but whose sinews bottom line is that such allows the harvesting of trees."

He was apparently referring to timber licenses, including integrated forest management agreements (IFMA), issued by the DENR.

Zobel also said the task at hand was to subject Defensor's proposal to "reservation scrutiny" in order to plug possible "loopholes" and to ensure that "the new projects will not give a legal leg leaf to big loggers to resume their operations."

Shipping costs

But the furniture makers were more concerned about the possible increase in production costs as a result of the high cost of inter-island shipping of materials.

Mapa said it was cheaper to ship end products from Davao to Hong Kong than to Manila. She said shipping raw materials across the islands was even more expensive than transporting the end product.

She also pointed out that the CFIP's 500 members, mostly small- and medium-scale enterprises, were hard to locate and might have difficulty acquiring wood from Mindanao because of the high transportation cost.

"We have always supported a selective log ban ... Sustainability is the source of our business ... But this should still be studied. What will happen to other regions in the country where there are trees but no raw material?" Mapa said.

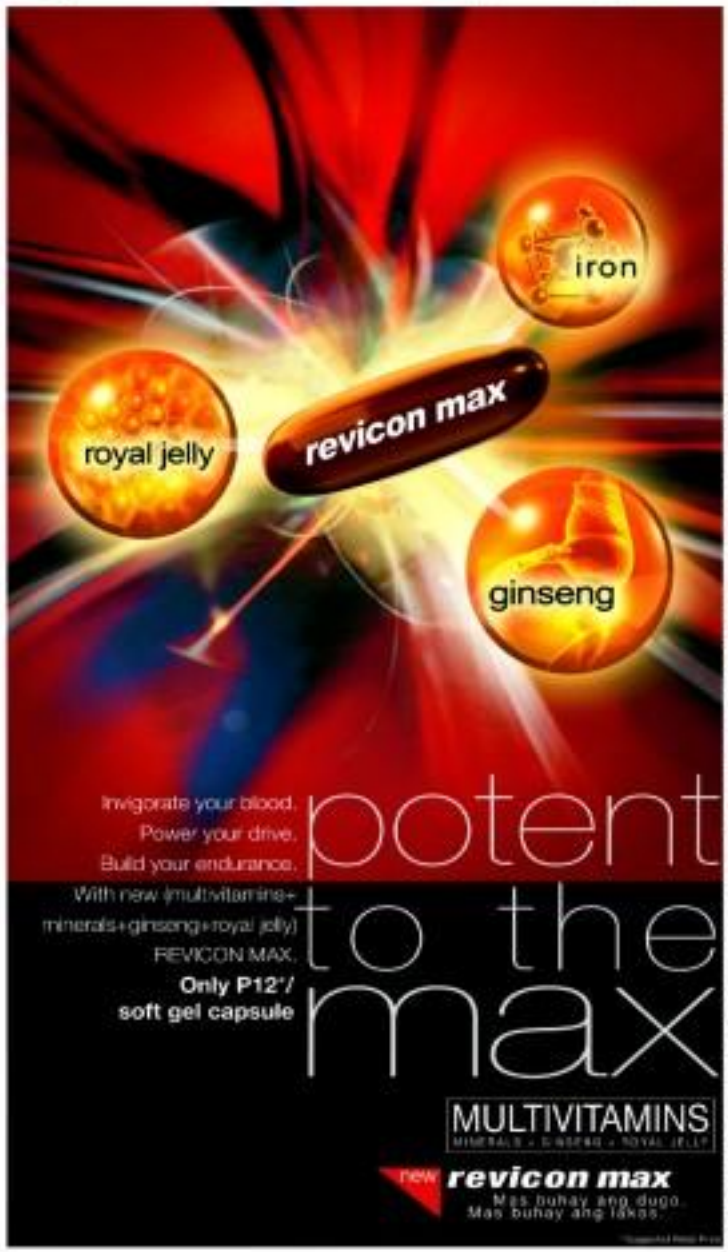
Rich tree flesh floods and landslides that killed and displaced more than 1,000 people in Quezon and Aurora last year, President Macapagal Arroyo ordered a total log ban nationwide.

The ban has been in effect since last June. It remains unclear, however, how much of the illegally cut timber would be confiscated because of the ban.

Mapa said the proposed limited logging operations should be "an improvement" because it would allow "a flow of materials."

"But as to whether it is the best solution to cost problem, I'm not sure..." she said, adding that the CFIP was willing to assist with the government on the matter.

The furniture industry brought in $264 million in export earnings last year, up 1 percent from 2003.



A PCEA from Health Secretary Manuel Dayrit dates back to 40 years ago.

'Tell kids, parents about sex'

Front page A1

"They do not know how pregnancy happens," even though some of them have had teenage children already, he said.

Climate of openness

"We should be talked about between parents and children," Dayrit said. "We want to create a culture where Filipinos actually talk about their sexuality and about their sexual health."

As it is, children would learn about sex quite late, and not from their parents. They would learn that at school, from bold movies, peer groups, or worse by reading dirty magazines, he said.

What's needed is a "climate of openness" rooted in the knowledge base where people "can talk about sex and their sexuality, about the number of children they want, and the methods they use to plan their families," he said.

Gifts from God

Quite a number of Filipinos were clueless about basic sexual reproduction, Dayrit said. He cited field studies by health workers which showed that many couples believed that children were gifts from God.

He attributed the Filipinos' naivete about sex to conservatism in society.

"A lot of it is cultural because people don't talk about sex," he said, remarking that "factual knowledge is often tempered by values. And if the values are such that they will reject knowledge then there's nothing you can do," he added.

Talking about sex openly would help the government's "Kaya Mo Yan" project, a P200-million program to help control population growth. Health secretary said was "premised on keeping mothers and children healthy."

Timing pregnancies

In many communities, Dayrit said many women didn't even know why they had menstrual periods or what the menses was for. He said a good number of men were no better, completely ignorant of what happens when the sperm and egg unite.

He cited the example of a woman in Bukidnon who decided not to have any more kids, yet continued to have unprotected sex.

"She doesn't understand completely how the cycle [get pregnant]," he said. If she knew about the process of ovulation then she would "time" their sexual activities and could avoid unwanted pregnancy, he added.

Building trust

There are mothers who still get pregnant even, say, after 10 children.

"The new pregnancy could be lust," the health secretary said. "What will happen to the children if the mother dies? The family will suffer."

Dayrit said teleducation had long stalled government efforts to manage population.

"The government promoted the use of condoms, supposedly for 40 years, but officials encouraged only 20 percent of the population to use them, because the principle behind the campaign had never 'seeped into the culture,' he explained.

"If you go to a household, you can't just have them in one room anymore," Dayrit said.

"You have to engage them in a conversation, you have to build a relationship so they trust you, and it can't be just one visit. You have to keep coming back so you can identify the families who are at risk." **With a report from AFP**

WEDNESDAY, PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

BUSINESS

PLDT net profit surged to ₱28B in '04

By Clarissa B. Batino

TELECOM giant Philippine Long Distance Telephone Co. yesterday reported a net profit of ₱28 billion on revenues of ₱115.2 billion for 2004, more than double the previous year's income and most banking analysts' forecasts.

The record profit was driven by huge recurring income from its wireless operations and helped by a one-time gain of ₱2.6 billion from the consolidation of its mobile phone business.

PLDT declared a 70-percent cash dividend or ₱74 a share to its common shareholders on record until March 2005.

Taking out gains derived mostly from Smart Communications Inc.'s acquisition of dissenting shares of Philippine Telephone Corp., PLDT's net profit in 2004 of ₱25.17 billion still surpassed its twice-upgraded profit target of ₱24 billion and was 22.7 percent higher than an adjusted 2003 income of ₱20.5 billion.

PLDT chair Manuel V. Pangilinan said that as an accounting standards, especially those pertaining to foreign exchange accounts, had made it harder to interpret financial results. A stable peso was most ideal, he added.

He said PLDT was the first Philippine company to adopt the new global accounting benchmarks ahead of schedule. The income in 2003 was adjusted from ₱13.3 billion.

"I would like to think we will achieve something like ₱27 billion for 2005. Having said that, I would like to recommend there is a great deal of difficulty in forecasting because of foreign exchange movements," the PLDT chair said.

Last year's wholesale growth grew dollar earnings by 20 percent, while local currency revenues rose 10 percent.

Smart, Pilipino to join price war

ALTHOUGH the competition was already with the entry of traffic pricing for mobile services, Philippine Long Distance Telephone Co. chair Manuel V. Pangilinan said that PLDT's wireless units would have no choice but to join the price war.

"There is a market segment developing. If that is where the market wants, then Smart will participate in that. We would say that's some value market of unlimited texting."

Total gov't debt balloons to ₱3.81B

By Michelle V. Rama

THE NATIONAL government's debt has soared ₱3.81 trillion as of end-December 2004 as it continued to resort to borrowings to fund expenditures that could not be accommodated by its weak revenue collections.

Where divided among the country's estimated 84 million population, each Filipino already has a ₱45,300 share in the government's debt burden.

The latest debt figure was equivalent to 76.7 percent of the country's gross domestic product (GDP) for 2004. It was also 0.5 percent higher than the ₱3.8 trillion recorded in November, and reflected a 13.6-percent increase from the end-2003 level.

The latest debt figure still did not include the national government's contingent liabilities amounting to ₱651.7 billion.

Contingent liabilities are the borrowings of state-owned companies guaranteed by the national government.

The Department of Finance reported that of the ₱3.81 trillion accumulated borrowings as of end-December, 52.1 percent, or about ₱2 trillion, came from domestic sources. The remaining 47.9 percent, or ₱1.8 trillion, were sourced from foreign creditors.

The amount of domestic debt was 17.5-percent higher than what was recorded in December 2003, while the latest foreign

Currencies

PESO-DOLLAR RATE

$1 = ₱56.26

As of 5 p.m., March 2, 2005

$1 = 103.66 ¥

As of 5 p.m., March 2, 2005

GOLD: $ 434.00-434.50

per ounce hedging, March 2, 2005

Stock Market

Shares close 0.43% higher

PSE COMPOSITE INDEX

Inquirer Monitor

Figures that matter in our matters life

Average monthly T-bill and lending rates

(January 2003 to February 2005)

ights offer price

By Elizabeth L. Sanchez

SAN Miguel Corp., Southeast Asia's biggest food and beverage firm, is estimated to raise roughly P17.8 billion from the sale of additional shares from treasury by the end of this month after it set the price for these shares yesterday.

The long-awaited stock rights offering is aimed at generating funds for the company's ambitious bid to become one of Asia-Pacific's top 10 companies in the next three years.

In a disclosure to the Philippine Stock Exchange, San Miguel said it would issue 175.4 million class "A" shares at P54.70 each (approximately P9.48 billion), and 111.2 million class "B" shares at P74.74 a share (or roughly P8.31 billion)

Francis Jardeleza, senior vice president and general counsel for San Miguel, told the PSE that the price set for the company's stock rights offering were based on a 5-percent discount to the average closing price of San Miguel from Jan. 28 to Feb. 24.

Before any discount was applied, the average closing prices for the rights shares for the period were at P57.58 for "A" shares, which are available only to Filipino investors, and P78.68 for "B" shares, which are open to both foreign and local investors.

The additional shares to be issued represent roughly 10 percent or 284.6 million shares out of San Miguel's 2.846 billion total outstanding shares.

The offer period for the shares will end on Mar. 31.

San Miguel has set March 7 as the record date for the stock rights offering, which means stockholders on the company's stock and transfer books as of that date will qualify for the offering.

Seen as a move to preserve the value of the coconut farmers' share in San Miguel, President Macapagal-Arroyo had said that the government would take part in the food conglomerate's $300-million stock rights offering using money from government financial institutions (GFIs).

The government has a 41-percent stake in San Miguel.

Shares

From page B1

141,590 shares worth P197.7 million.

Manila Electric Co.'s "B" shares, available to foreign investors, rose P1 to P52 while its "A" shares, limited to local investors, were up 50 centavos at P19.50.

PLDT's mobile phone unit, Pilipino Telephone Corp, gained 10 centavos to P3.70.

Ayala Corp was up 50 centavos to P8.50, while its Ayala Land Inc. unit fell 30 centavos to P9.10.

Benpres Holdings Corp fell four centavos to P1.30, while Globe Telecom was up P10 at P945 and SM Prime Holdings fell 10 centavos to P8.50. AFP

PHILIPPINE STOCK EXCHANGE

(As of March 1, 2005)

NO. OF ADVANCES: 61, NO. OF DECLINES: 68, NO. OF UNCHANGED: 38, NO. OF TRADED ISSUES: 167, NO. OF UNTRADED: 0

DISCLOSURES

ARIES Prime Resources Inc. denied having any information relating to the unusual price movement of their shares in the market.

***

SAN Miguel Corp. issued price for preemptive rights offering equivalent to P54.70 per share for Class A common shares and P74.74 per share to Class B common shares. It also submitted the details of the capital structure as of Jan. 31 to the exchange.

***

ABS-CBN Holdings Corp. announced the reduction on its Philippine Deposits Receipts (PDR) today to a total of 270,194,800 PDRs.

***

JOLLIBEE Foods Corp. announced that a total 553,516 shares were exercised and fully paid under the Company's Stock Option Plan, bringing the Treasury shares to a total of 30,892,855 shares.

***

A BROWN Co. Inc. bought 280,000 BRN shares at P0.35 per share last Feb 24.

***

CITYLAND Development Corp. announced the increased in sales of more than 10 percent on a monthly and quarterly year-on-year basis.

Compiled by Chona Galang, PSE Research

Still GMA-resistant

FOUR years have passed since Edsa II, but the decisive elimination of Joseph Estrada seems to still smart from their most famous classmate having been driven out of Malacañang by Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo.

In the Makevaling luncheon weekend Monday by GMA to mark the Manila Rotary Club's centennial celebration, former Customs Commissioner Ricardo Anupil, an immediate past Rotary president, was a no-show.

Also, members of the Ateneo High School Class 1955 and active Rotarians like Antonio Lopa, Cipriano Reyes of Cosmic Lubricants of the Philippines, Jesus Poncela and former DILG Mel administrator Felicito Payumo were prominently missing from the Wednesday luncheon.

Payumo, when reached, did not wish to add to the speculative fire, saying GMA had originally been invited by the Rotary Club to their Feb. 19 lunch but didn't make it until year.

But with GMA having declined the original Rotary invitation, a number of Rotarians invited to the Monday make-up luncheon noted GMA had already made prior commitments, and four were unable to attend. Payumo explained, before the line purposely were taken.

The Arroyo factor

TI BIR2 has been on his only two declared candidates for the chairmanship of the Philippine Stock Exchange, and that is none other than the incumbent, Ms. Gloria Kim Arroyo.

Still, according to the grapevine, GMA chum Bernardino Ahm, who would submit the name of herself over at GSIS president Winston Garcia, has indicated he would abstain from voting for the new PSE chair.

Because Ahm does not want to be caught in the still lurching dispute between the wife of Jose Pidal and her former "mentor," Ms. Ilusion Pathetique.

According to the grapevine, not only a

COCKTAILS

Victor C. Agnatthi

Fathergate a short-listed GSIS broker, but her frequent golf games with Mike Arroyo are something not to be taken light by.

Fathergate herself has denied a press statement that she is not interested in the chairmanship, a position she had held immediately before Mr Arroyo, but that apparently had close links to classmate Ahm, a former Malacañang legislative liaison officer, then his boss-to-be.

Move-go-round

♦ ATNLA Land senior vice president Miriam Katigbak more than doubled her money in less than three weeks after the disposal of more than two million ALI shares at P6.10 to P9.30 a share, which also acquired earlier this month through the company's stock option plan.

♦ LUFTHANSA is dropping the Bangkok stopover in the Manila-Frankfurt flight in favor of Guangzhou beginning March 26.

♦ PEOPLE power? ERC boss Godinez Jr has tendered the resignation to pave the way for the Standard Today merger. The merged paper will be called, what else but, "Manila Standard Today."

Heard through the grapevine

THE HIGHEST duty-dodging importer is no longer a certain Lucio, but a certain Thomas, also with a humongous surname. This Thomas' secret weapon happens to be his secretary Vicky.

Email: cocktails_pdi@phdaily.net or cocktales_pdi@yahoo.com)

iVantage sells stake in IT firm

COMMUNICATION Era Holdings Corp. said its board has approved the sale of its 20 percent stake in Stratec Technologies Inc. for P42.16 million.

It said its disclosure yesterday that its board authorized management to dispose of all of Hamtaga's equity in Stratec totaling 178,970 shares. It did not disclose further details.

Hamtaga, formerly known as Hamtaga Equities Inc., was organized primarily to engage in oil and gas exploration. In 1997, the company changed its primary purpose to financial holdings and investments. Since then, the board recommended a change in the corporation's name to Hamtaga Equities.

However, in 2000, the company amended its primary purpose to communication as well as changed its name to Era Holdings Corp. in line of its new purpose of including investments in information technology companies and other related ventures.

During the same year, the company acquired 100 percent of the common stock of E-Business Inc., a company involved in E-commerce payments, and 51 percent of the common stock of Lucky Star Communications Network Inc., a company involved in network design, consulting and implementation. In 2001, Pilmaga incorporated Libreti Inc., an online remittance company. Elizabeth L. Zamudio

Total gov't debt . . .

Previous page B1

debt figure translated in a 0.7 percent year-on-year increase.

Of the total debt, 76.6 percent represented borrowings maturing in the short term, 37.4 percent over the medium term, and 57 percent in the long term.

The DOF said the higher domestic debt mainly reflected net peso borrowings, was in line with the policy of limiting the government's exposure to foreign exchange risks.

"The country's debt burden continues to be one of the biggest challenges that the national government faces. We have one of the biggest debt-to-GDP ratios in the world, and it's about time that we strongly address this longer-run issue," newly appointed Finance Secretary Cesar Purisima said in a statement.

The finance chief said the government, through the DOF, would continue pursuing both legislative and administrative measures to strengthen its revenue collection, administrative measures include

privatization of government assets and rationalization of the spending capacities of the bureaus of Internal Revenue and of Customs. Legislative measures, on the other hand, include tax proposals such as the increase in the value-added tax from 10 to 12 percent.

The government is targeting to close its revenue and public sector budget deficit on or before 2010. The budget deficit for 2004 hit P180.1 billion, for 2005, the deficit is supposed to be a little lower at P160 billion.

Purisima said the Arroyo administration's proposed new rates were geared toward reducing the government's debt burden.

"Let me add, however, that we will only explore legitimate measures in debt reduction. Talks of debt repudiation are counterproductive," Purisima said. The finance chief stressed that the country has to keep its credit image in the international community to avoid eroding investor confidence.

PLDT net . . .

From page B1

reduced the group's foreign exchange losses to P2.7 billion against P9 billion in 2005.

Smart's listed unit, Philippine Telephone Corp., also announced a net increase of P6.6 billion in 2006, reversing the P3.4 billion in losses the previous year.

Without the one-time adjustments due to its improved revenue-sharing deal with parent firm Smart, PLDT's profit last year stood at P4.9 billion.

An absolute deal hoped-with Smart last year allowed PLDT to retain 80 percent of its revenue-share as it uses the parent firm's network and avoids itself of Smart's transmission capacities.

Smart and PLDT ended 2006 with 39.2 million subscribers, accounting for 58 percent of the cellular phone market. Smart added 4.3 million customers and PLDT's Talk N' Text attracted another 1.7 million over last year with 14.6 million and 8.6 million users, respectively.

Smart now owns 86.5 percent of PLDT and is in the process of acquiring the remaining 6.5 percent stake of PLDT. Once this is completed, Smart would own 92 percent of PLDT.

By the end of the year, Smart would have completed its acquisition of Meridian Telekom Inc., a high-speed Internet provider previously owned by the family of Mark Jimenez.

GLOBE's 9M115.2 billion in revenues, 1965.1 billion came from the fixed-line business. "The fixed line is showing some signs of strength and vitality," Pangilinan said.

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Malay-RP joint venture bags oil, gas contract

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SERVE Phils. Inc.

By Abigail L. Ho

FOR THE fifth time since the Supreme Court ruled that the Philippine Mining Act was constitutional three months ago, the Department of Energy awarded a petroleum service contract to a Filipino-Malaysian consortium, Philodrill Petroenergy Corp., for the exploration of oil and gas in southern Cebu.

Service Contract (SC) 49 which was awarded yesterday would cover 263,000 hectares in the Visayan basin, a location the DOE had studied high for the petroleum resources seen.

Proof of this is that two recently awarded petroleum service contracts, SC 44 to Singapore Gas to Gold Pte. Ltd., and SC 46 to Japan Petroleum Exploration Co. Ltd., are located in the Visayan basin.

SC 44 involves oil and gas exploration in coastal Cebu, while SC 46 entails exploration over the Tawas Straits in Negros Occidental.

Under SC 49, Phil-Mal will invest $2.15 million for the conduct of geological and geophysical studies over the area. This amount likewise covers the drilling of one well during the first two years of the seven-year exploration period and another two wells during the second and third phases of exploration.

"The signing of yet another service contract in less than a week highlights the growing momentum in the upstream petroleum industry in the country," Energy Secretary Vincent Perez said in a statement yesterday. "I hope that this momentum will further gain acceleration to bring us closer to our goal of energy independence through increased development of our indigenous energy resources."

Just last week, the DOE awarded five coal exploration and development contracts covering various locations in the Visayas and Mindanao to three local mining firms.

Two contracts were signed with Nihi Mining and Energy Corp., a subsidiary of fuel and energy trading firm Mosphy Group, for the exploration and development of coal resources in South Cotabato and in the southern part of Cebu.

Two other contracts were awarded to Semirara Exploration Inc., the local arm of Canadian-Australian Energy Corp., for exploration activities in the Balambalan-Negas and Dalupaon coal fields in Cebu.

The fifth contract, which involved the right to explore and develop coal resources in Diplahan-Batag, Zamboanga Sibugay, was awarded to Philex Mining Corp.

SC 49 is the fifth petroleum service contract awarded over the last three months and the seventh over a span of 15 months.

Perez said $10 million in new investments were expected to pour in from the new contracts.

Datuk Peting Ee Sri, Phil-Mal chair of the Malaysian component of the consortium, said the firm would be supporting the government's thrust toward energy self-sufficiency by engaging in more oil and gas exploration activities in the future.

Investment firm plays down LBC complaint

By Elizabeth L. Sanchez

AFB IDE Eng Capital Partners Inc. (AFB IE Capital) is playing down the complaint the LBC Group has filed against the investment house, saying that its services had been cleared by the board of TPG Corp. before it tapped the funds of the pre-need firm.

In a complaint filed with the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas, consolidated services provider LBC Group accused AFB IE Capital of misusing the trust fund of the pre-need firm TPG Corp. by hiring a group of architects to draw up a property in Davao.

The pre-need firm owns the 0.6 ha to the 1,000-square-meter property in Davao. TPG Corp. invested on par up its southern headquarters on the property.

AFB IE Capital is an investment house with authority from the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas to act as trustee of a portion of the trust funds of TPG.

AFB IE Capital said the complaint referred to a 2004 transaction on behalf of the TPG Trust Fund. The deal called for the hiring of architects to prepare a study on the Davao property.

The investment house said it engaged the services of the architect "with the approval" of the TPG board, according to AFB IE Financial, the parent firm of AFB IE Capital, in its disclosure to the Philippine Stock Exchange (PSE).

"The complaint dealt with the engagement of an excellent team of three architects from Harvard University in 2003 to undertake a best use study intended to enhance the value of a property in Davao's Central Business District owned by the TPG Trust Fund," AFB IE Capital said in a statement. "The [cost of the] study project ... and the hiring of the team of architects was decided by the TPG Board."

AFB IE Capital said Carlos Arnaiz was TPG chairman of the board at that time.

Arnaiz is head of the LBC Group. The courier service provider owns 50 percent of Pro-Assistrol Mutual Holdings Inc., which, in turn, owns 80 percent of the pre-need firm TPS Corp.

However, Arnaiz said the decision that the hiring of architects was not taken up by the board.

AFB IE Capital also said that the LBC Group previously lodged three complaints against the investment house over the last few months in "[a continuing] attempt to avoid paying the P553.20 million" it reportedly owed the AFB Group.

Earlier, the AFB Group filed a suit against LBC in the United States "for corporate waste and breach of the fiduciary duty."

"Offhand, we would view [the complaint] as pure harassment, in connection with our P553 million claim against Mr. Carlos Arnaiz and LBC Development Corp., and the case filed against them in the United States," according to AFB IE.

In its complaint, LBC claimed that in May 2001, AFB IE Capital spent P1.079 million of the TPG trust fund to pay for the services of the architects, who included the son of AFB IE Capital chairwoman Arnaiz.

"The commissioning of the son of AFB's chair to render the building design ... is highly unusual," the LBC's legal counsel said.

The LBC also claimed that "the project was awarded without a benefit of public bidding or soliciting quotations from at least three qualified architects."

"AFB should never allow its executives or any of their family members to deal directly and gain benefit out of the trust funds," LBC added.

AFB IE said in a disclosure to the PSE that "the use of the TPG trust fund to pay for the best use study was actually suggested by Ms. Carlos Arnaiz (LBC director) himself, and that Mr. Ramon S. Arnaiz, chairman of AFB IE Capital, abstained from the TPG Board deliberations of this engagement since one of the three architects is his son."

But Arnaiz countered: "How can I suggest something to the board, which was not taken up by the board? ... It is the money of the trust fund, and only the trust fund manager, AFB IE, has full power and authority ... without intervention from the TPG — to decide to whom to invest the fund."

Arnaiz's earlier sought to annul a 1999 joint venture agreement with the AFB Group.

Also, the Arnaiz Group refused to buy back a 10 percent stake in the holding firm LBC Global Corp. valued at P553.2 million. This prevented AFB Ibis Fong Financial from converting its option to sell back its Asiatrol investment over to LBC Global.

The option expires end-June.

Retail giants poured in ₱26.78B in 2004

By Ronnel W. Domingo

THE DEPARTMENT of Trade and Industry yesterday said that approved investments went up 271 percent to a total of P210.7 billion in 2004.

The DTI yesterday released the revised data which showed that, in January, investments approved by the Board of Investments and the Philippine Economic Zone Authority were estimated to reach about P180 billion in 2004, an increase of about 217 percent from the P56.7 billion approved in 2003.

SANTOS

Yesterday, the department said the updated figures were higher due to the inclusion of P26.78 billion in investments the retail trade giants sank in last year.

These include ventures by Louis Vuitton Malletier SA, Adidas Salomon AG, Caltex Services Philippines Inc., McDonalds, Petron Corp. and Watsons Personal Care Stores.

The investments, which are expected to create about 5,000 new jobs, came in five years after the Retail Trade Liberalization Act allowed foreign companies to engage in the local retail sector.

Before the measure was signed into law in 2000, foreign retailers used to put in only P470 million or a mere 0.8 percent of total investments. Last year's P26.78 billion accounts for 12.7 percent of the total.

Trade Secretary Juan B. Santos said the influx of more retail businesses from abroad was a sign of the growing confidence of foreign firms in the nation's economy and their firm belief that they could do profitable business here.

"Foreign retailers have seen the increasing buying power of Filipinos and this ignited their interest to do business in the country," Santos said.

As of Dec. 31, 2004, investments from foreign retailers have reached a total of P48.01 billion, accounting for 208 stores and about 11,900 new jobs.

The biggest came from the US fast-food giant McDonalds, which put in P36.7 billion in 155 outlets nationwide.

Also, BOI approvals grew 481 percent, generating P164.5 billion, while Peza approved investments went up to P46.1 billion, or 62 percent higher than the previous year's.

The biggest projects were committed in the power sector, including GNPower Ltd.'s P96.52-billion combined cycle power plant that runs on liquefied natural gas, and two of PNOC Energy Development Corp.'s geothermal projects—the P5.4-billion Negros project and the P2.58-billion Palinpinon 2 optimization project.

Trade Undersecretary Elmer C. Hernandez said investment promotion agencies were stepping up their marketing activities to bring in the much-needed investments that would develop the country's industries in the manufacturing, infrastructure and IT services sectors.

Hernandez, who is also BOI managing head, said the BOI was already preparing the 2005 Investment Priorities Plan and that the 2004 IPP was being reviewed "to tailor-fit the next one to the needs of the industries."

US firm pushes RP as global IT hub

THE GOVERNMENT and private sector should embark on an aggressive international marketing campaign to promote the country as a destination for information and communications technology ventures to maximize its potential, according to an American consultancy firm.

Tully Moss, president of Magellan Alliance, yesterday told a forum of industry players and government officials that the Philippines held the second largest market share in outsourcing, but that the sharing of knowledge about the country was very low.

The country has been attracting companies in the US, Europe and other developed countries and regions as a destination for outsourced services.

Experts say the country enjoys an advantage over other contact center locations like India due to competitive costs, a talent pool that is highly educated and naturally service-oriented and its cultural affinity with major markets like the US.

"The Philippine Inc. brand [as a destination for IT businesses], as well as its potential of creating value for stakeholders must be articulated," Moss said.

The forum, which focused on positioning the Philippines as a global center for IT-enabled services center was organized by the American Chamber of Commerce of the Philippines and John Clements Consultants Inc.

Moss also proposed that the local industry, along with concerned government agencies, work on influencing consultancy firms, other governments, industry associations and other entities that influence investment decisions.

"You must leverage offers of help from NASSCOM [National Association of Software and Service Companies, the chamber of commerce and India's main trade body for the sector], foreign governments and others for this effort," he said.

Another step was to invite select media organizations to send representatives to the country, where they can be apprised of how conducive the Philippines is for ITES activities and get first-hand information on the situation here.

"You must also work on getting speaking roles in outsourcing conferences abroad, especially in the United States," Moss said. "Many people in the US do not realize the close relationship of our two countries and how [this can be favorable to making business]." *Ronnel W. Domingo*

DOF says no to House proposal on VAT bill

By Michelle V. Remo

THE DEPARTMENT of Finance is not in favor of a proposal from the legislature that will disallow the passing on of value-added tax to consumers.

A Finance official explained that the proposal was not administratively possible.

"Who will determine if it will be passed on or not?" Finance Undersecretary Gil Beltran asked.

According to Beltran, it is the nature of VAT to be passed on because of its input-output credit mechanism.

The proposal to disallow the passing on of the VAT came from opposition congressmen led by Minority Leader Francis Escudero.

The congressman said his group would only support the proposal to lift the VAT exemption of several products and services if the bill would contain a "no-pass on" provision.

The DOF has identified various products and services whose VAT exemptions should be lifted. These include imported petroleum and its raw materials, services rendered by cooperatives, and those rendered by doctors and lawyers.

Opposition congressmen said that, by disallowing the passing on of VAT, poor families would be protected from the expected increase in prices of goods and services.

But the DOF said there was no way to monitor whether or not businesses would pass on the VAT to consumers.

The DOF has also stressed that the increase in prices resulting from an expanded coverage of the VAT, and from a separate proposal to increase its rate from 10 to 12 percent, will only have a minimal impact on poor families.

Finance officials have cited a government study showing that an increase in the VAT rate or expansion of its coverage will only result in a 0.2 percent increase in expenses of poor families.

Batangas feed millers to invest in hybrid corn

LIPA CITY—Feed millers, egg producers and hog traders owners of the region have agreed to invest in the production of hybrid corn.

The move to plant some 1,500 hectares to hybrid corn is expected to solve the province's problem with metric tons supply that led to increasing prices of pork and poultry products.

The resolution to engage in hybrid corn production was signed by the stakeholders at the corn production congress during a forum last month with the Batangas Corn Production Cooperative.

Industry data showed that Batangas uses some 1.5 tons of corn a day to produce feeds.

About half of the supply comes from as far as Isabela, thus, increasing the cost of the feed.

"If the 1,000 hectares of corn land in the entire province is planted with corn, the price of pork and poultry products will not be so high," said Hermer Besana, president of Limconas Multi-purpose cooperative.

Batangas is the country's main source of poultry products and one of the top five suppliers of pork.

Besana estimated that producing corn locally could reduce the price of corn by at least P1 a kilo, which would translate to significant savings.

Corn production has not kept up with demand, according to data from the Department of Agriculture.

For instance, corn production increased 1.13 percent from 1995 to 2004, while corn production only went up by 1 percent.

"We have no permanent corn planters. That's because other high-value crops compete with corn production. When a farmer sees that the price of sugarcane or bananas gets higher, they would automatically stop planting corn and switch to the high-value crops," Ugarillas said.

But the government is encouraging farmers to plant hybrid corn.

She also encouraged the Agrarian Reform Communities (ARC) to form groups and plant corn. —Abel Magtalas-Lubo, PDI Southern Luzon Bureau

WOW visitors signed up for a hybrid corn production program to help bring down pork prices.

THE NEWS. Spanish Ambassador to the Philippines Ignacio Sagaz (left) and Spain's economic and commercial counselor Jose Miguel Cortes (right) read a copy of the Philippine Daily Inquirer during the opening of the 2nd Spanish Products & Services Expo at the EM Megamall.

Bohol taps group to draft P10-M tourism master plan

By Chito B. Puentes
PDI Visayas Bureau

TAGBILARAN CITY—Encouraged by the recent increase in tourism arrivals, the provincial government has tapped a private group to draft a tourism master plan for Bohol.

Gov. Erico Aumentado said the master plan will be undertaken by Pacific Consultants International (PCI), which has proposed to develop three tourism circuits in the province.

These are the Panglao, Baliwasog and Chocolate Hills, the Loboc-Bilar-Inabanga-Antequera circuits, and the Corazon-Dauis-Tubigon circuit.

There are on top of the Ubay area, which was identified for agri-tourism and eco-tourism.

The local government has also proposed that the plan include the Anda peninsula in Lila and the Talibon-Calape-Getafe-Inabanga-Tubigon-Buenavista-Getafe and Talibon areas among the major tourism clusters.

Aumentado said in a letter to the provincial board that PCI did a similar master plan for other leading tourism destinations, such as Bali in Indonesia and Phuket in Thailand.

The plan was expected to be completed in a year at a cost of about P 10 million.

Aumentado said the Department of Tourism will shoulder P5 million of the cost. Each of Bohol's three congressmen will provide P1.5 million, while the provincial government will contribute P2.5 million.

Bohol has been cited as one of the country's best tourism destinations due to its cultural and physical attractions.

It has also been noted for its efforts to preserve its resources.

Cordillera seeks 7.2% growth from 2005-10

BAGUIO CITY—The Cordillera Administrative Region is targeting 7.7 percent growth in its gross regional domestic product over the next five years.

According to the National Economic and Development Office here, the growth will come from investments in agriculture and industrial firms in the Region Economic Zone authority.

The Regional Development Council of the Cordillera added that the pace of investment growth would increase from 15 percent in 2003 to 20 percent by 2010.

Exports, on the other hand, were expected to double from $5.5 million in 2005 to $9.2 billion in 2010.

Jose Dacuney, assistant director of the National Economic and Development Authority for the Cordillera, said industrial firms remained the biggest contributors to the Cordillera economy, but manufacturing firms based in the Region economic zone generated the biggest growth in 2005 at 91 percent.

Dacuney said the region would have fared poorly without the contribution of Baguio City.

"This tells us that we need to create new manufacturing sectors outside Baguio," Dacuney told the RDC.

The region is best poised to become self-sufficient due to the dwindling funds from the national government.

The fund the local government to undertake high-impact infrastructure projects and health services in the Cordillera autonomous.

Dacuney said the national government's requested subsidy for infrastructure programs have risen at P14 billion, but the pending General Appropriations Act cut it down to only P5 billion.

Doctors of the Department of Health said an emergency measure awaiting further curtailed government purchases in 2005, which would cause a shortage of medicine.

"The budget has already affected government's counterpart fund for various health programs that are sponsored by foreign donors," said Dr. Antonio Bacelora, DOH Cordillera spokesperson. Vincent Cabreza, *PDI Northern Luzon Bureau*

Smart, Piltel . . .

(continued from B1)

ing power that's resulting in PLDT's financial results for 2004.

Smart Communications Inc. and Pilipino Telephone Corp., PLDT's two wireless subsidiaries, ended 2004 with 19.2 million subscribers.

Pangilinan said the wireless unit experienced the highest subscriber take-up during the fourth quarter even when Sun Cellular's 24/7 plan was already selling in the market, proving that PLDT was hardly affected by the unlimited campaign.

Sun Cellular launched its unlimited voice and text plan of P250 for a month and P100 for 10 days on top of existing subscription plans in October 2004. The move increased its customer to more than 1.5 million as of January from 700,000 in September 2004.

"Both Globe and Smart have to address this new market. We will decide what options to take. At some point, sooner rate 2005, Smart will tap into this new unlimited voice market. It is a market segment that we have to participate in," the PLDT chief added.

Globe would start this month a 30-day promo namely the unlimited text to its Touch Mobile brand. At P300 for 30 days, Touch Mobile users could send thousands of unlimited voice and text and as P50, 5 days of unlimited text.

The unit is positive that market share will become more pronounced this year as Pangilinan forecasts a slowdown in mobile subscriber take-up for PLDT as well as the whole industry.

It appears though that the projected slowdown has yet to affect PLDT its top official said that based on January results, adjusted fiber take and revenue were ahead compared to January 2004.

Pangilinan said Sun Cellular must be complemented by having developed a new product that was keeping competitive works at night. He said though that he was not among the sleepless ones.

"The paradigm is changing with fees. And this provides an exciting future for PLDT," he said. The PLDT chief is worried that the regulators, the National Telecommunications Commission, would treat Sun Cellular with kid gloves in contrast to how they—Smart and Globe—were penalized during the time when their networks were suffering from drop calls.

Pangilinan said the older players invested "tons of money" into their facilities to deliver world-grade quality service.

But if the regulators would not apply rigid standards fairly, then Smart and Piltel would compete under the same terms, he said.

The PLDT chief said he was also worried as to how the MTC would decide on issues related to the third-generation frequencies or 3G as well as on the Voice over Internet Protocol or VoIP.

He said the third-line business would be threatened by VoIP. This is an Internet technology that would allow cheaper long distance calls.

Cherlene S. Bolivar

2bU! LIFESTYLE

Editor Chele Bunol-Formoso
Chief of Correspondents Pam Pastor

A 2bU! FASHION FREAKS SPECIAL

THE BUZZ ON *Part 2* BAZAARS

Last week's young entrepreneurs are still reeling from the great feedback you gave them.

THIS week, we have another batch of amazing young partners.

Two army wives who make silky soap books, notepads and beaded bookmarks; a fiesta girl whose online obsession is a haven for bling; goody; an accidental entrepreneur who is now making fun earrings; an architecture graduate whose fabrications have been making waves in two different cities; a young mom whose P75-pens lamps can light up your world; an artist who mix whip up jewelry based on your favorite icons; a girl who takes pride in creating unique and affordable accessories; a young businesswoman who designs colorful bags; some producing students who fought hard for their edgy underwear brand, two different twenty-four-year-olds with a shared passion for creating beautiful accessories; and an enterprising twenty-three-year-old who hand-beads skin-ready flip-flops.

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From 'suman' to bags

Mimi Tanco is the girl behind the colorful bag line

Text by Bianca Caronongan
2bU! Correspondent
Photos by Oca Alimario

MIMI Tanco had no plans of going into bags. Her first venture into business was supplying suman balik in a hotel in Ortigas. But she found the business tiring, and she had to cut classes.

"The bags were actually the answer to the problems I had with the suman-sidik business," she said. "I all started out with a plain black bag that caught the attention of my friends. They kept asking where I got the bag, so I thought, 'Why not sell to them?'"

Word got around, and penny soon, Mimi's bags were getting sold. "I started by mixing and matching cartoon designs; I suppose that's what makes my bags adorable," she says. "Customers have the power to order a bag of their own design, colors and materials, and as a result, nice, MIMI bags are fashionable, colorful and affordable."

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A tale of two cities

(and a lot of jewelry)

Text by Pan Pastor
Photos by Roger Carpio and Rony Hardinata

YOU can say that twenty-three-year-old Farah Alvi is a whiz with her hands.

In high school, she used to incorporate her jeans and do her own beadwork. In college, she took her coat, clothing without sewing machines, at one point, she even whipped up a gown for her sister overnight.

"I am business-minded, ambitious, artistic and creative. I never run out of things to do. Whatever it is, I put my heart into it and do whatever it takes to get what I want. I just love to make things beautiful and I love to make beautiful things."

In 2003, she tried making necklaces out of threads and crystals and ended up loving it.

"Basically, design for me is a challenge and I put my heart and soul into each design to make it right, to make it perfect."

Soon, Farah began selling her creations, not by names but in the desire to spread the joy of owning beautiful things. "I can't wear them all, you know and they need to be worn."

Since then, her brand G.L.A.M. (Glam Love for Accessories Material) has won the hearts of a lot of fashionistas.

Although it is based in Manila, her wares have also been selling well in her hometown Iligan. "I never really had the intention of selling in Iligan because all my pieces were Manila-based. But since I brought my designs with me to Iligan, I decided to display them in one recent event in our house and started noticing people I would have to say the hardest to equally shop in both places is different ways."

Apparently people in the two cities have varied tastes. "I've noticed that the wood and the silver look more in Manila while in Mindanao, people never mean for myriads and rarely look at my wood products."

Farah draws inspiration from her friends and the people surrounding her. "My designs have been inspired by different people. The Rainbow Bowl, Dangle Bamboo Ely, Butterfly Garden and the two-strand Pink Pond, were inspired by just one person, when I am in a quiet and happy, I am able to make a lot of designs in one sitting. The ideas just keep on flowing."

She loves working with pearls. "I think they're so simple and yet so grand."

Farah may be happily living the life of a jewelry designer now but this architecture graduate from the University of Santo Tomas still intends to pursue her original path. "My plan now is to open a store/boutique in my hometown and go back to Manila on a second while continuing for the brand extrinsic."

"It sounds her well, no doubt about it, but we hope she'd never stop creating beautiful things. The world needs them.

For orders and inquiries, call or e-mail Farah at 0917-7532137 and glam_love_4_accessories_material@yahoo.com.

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emceed by Audie Gemora

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www.araneta coliseum.com

MARAMI'Sly Cora. Hoop style, go for P200

WIRE dangling earrings, go for P150

Eyecandy for your ears

Text by Kristine Ching
24/7 Correspondent
Photos by Rudy Esparza

EARRINGS sure can do wonders to a girl's wardrobe. It can save one's face after a failed attempt of encountering Nicole Kidman's makeup. It is a proud girl's tedium expressing since body ring hasn't yet hit down to the umbrella.

It keeps you from going nuts after rummaging on the inside, "I gotta wear accessories!" because necklaces will surely have a catfight with your ruffled top. Here's the problem, unique and fashionable earrings are hard to find in this age of mass production.

Not anymore! Cora Gadi designs and makes earrings for anyone who wants to evoke fun. It's not a surprise that Cora stays away from medical robots besides the clinics ask for it. Instead, she mixes and matches colors and materials—from pearls, precious stones, glass beads and semi-precious—making her pieces stand out. Prices are reasonable at P200-300, but it can go up to P900-800 for special event pieces, debut, etc.) earrings. It all depends on the material used or the load per piece/hour set.

This weekend entrepreneur is an architect that was looking for another creative outlet. Cora started out by making earrings for herself. Her friend was impressed by her works, decided to feature it as a sequence.

For orders: Call or text Cora Gadi at 0927-7247368 or e-mail at ggadi@hotmail.com

SA PNB RAPID REMIT, PAGLIPAT MO NG PAHINANG ITO...

BOAZ WOMEN
Visit Kan Tavratka and Marina Shen

GLOWIN LURASIA ladies Vanessa Marupa, Chris Tan, Celine Lopez and Preston's beauty basten Agnes Bangson

VANITY LARSUK. Embassy resident DJ Phantom and Ohio is the first time in history they will be labeled as such) friends.

Confessions of a club owner

GUESS what, I have been staying home more often these days.

Of course, when I say home, I mean the "room-that-has-wall" of the host's bastion of territorial serving fortresses.

Call it wave of fate, but soon every time I walk through Embassy's glass walkway sliding entrance doors etc, I prepare myself to make sure every one feels pampered. This is quite due again to one of my past customer at Republic Bar of other night spots. My respect for Louie Ysmael rubs his heart doing a store for Ysmael, whose has gone even higher.

It is quite obvious that Manila is having a nightlife resurgence. People are partying all night, and not with some fuel for it. Case in point: the advance has broken out of his shell and is now willing to dish out the dough to make sure he enjoys every day (and night) to the fullest.

The yuppie mantra has shifted from "save it for a rainy day" to "choose yourself with as much blessings...I deserve it"—oh well, as we all know by now, life is too short. Stood drinking of Moet & Chandon and Veuve Clicquot champagne (Yuta love.)

Observing the action from behind the Embassy velvet rope today, some see—but soon they'll well be), I have witnessed what people can or will do just to get inside a packed club. Camouflaging as a guest. In this town, everyone thinks he deserves the VIP treatment (which, in a service-oriented industry, is expected—but just like the World Series Mileage Club, you need to save your points). Here, people are so used where they have to pay for the cover charge.

Then again, it's really never a cover charge...it's a redeemable drink coupon with a stamp. Outside Embassy, other progressive clubs like Ha-lo, Kawayanera, Red, V and Club V ask for a cover charge which comes with a drink or two.

The bottom line is, if we want the club scene to survive, let's support it.

Think of it as your little contribution to the improvement of the club scene that you so absolutely love.

"What people do not realize is that they are occupying a prime piece of real estate...and these days is not cheap," as said Ian Schnapp, proprietor of hip bistro mod/lobrah. "We didn't have to pay to the other places!"

Some would protest. Maybe that's why these places closed. Yes, precisely because when you need before was really a restaurant that turn itself into a bar that turns itself into a club.

Some "bores" (meaning, people who I have never met in my whole life—and that's actually very low) would send text messages to me to ask if they could get in for free.

"How come I'm not part of the list?" some text guest would complain. Oh well, just like the velvet rope, the list is still a work in progress. "How come the bouncer doesn't know me?" a publicist/club promoter was chastised during the opening party.

Well, guess what? The bouncer didn't even recognize Juliana Palermo and Jhoni Uribe when they lined up for the VIP room last Saturday. So unless you're Sharon Cuneta, don't expect the doormen to know who you are.

Either that or just text me or one of my partners, Erik Cua, Jon Herrera and my favorite chef, Fernando Amorsolo. Or simply call ahead to be on the list.

HOST ELIGIBLE. Ricky Delgado and Connie Calayca

TO A brighter year ahead

EMBASSY Hill Rap on Wednesdays

DJ's birthday

Speaking of Jon, my favorite multilingual buddy, DJ Monsoon, made sure he had a good set of Asians in white for his Blue mod and Veuve vogue birthday party last week, as seen on this page.

White was the color from dress to after party, while white-ta (diamonds, Swiffah dahlings...if I may borrow from Celine Lopez and Maureen Ayuede) was for the ladies.

Apple-lovers (as JV would put it), the light-hearted guests presented to the VIP room attendant his best buddy Migz Bondoc, splendored with requiem and white roses and candles. Mirror balls and white balloons completed the white fantasy that DJ wished for himself on his natal day.

DJ Jon Herrera's house music interspersed with funky retro made the party-like atmosphere dancing about it. Or was (answer#1) home.

I guess I'll continue to stay home—my parents need their G.R.O.

SALIVATE. Cielo Kantoa shrinks for summer

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LIFESTYLE

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Flip-flop fanatic

Text by Pluto Pastor
Photos by Rudy Esguerra

Rain hand-beads the good old 'baineles' and turns them into irresistible fashion pieces

THE INTENSE heat is tormenting us all, but the arrival of summer gives us one thing to be happy about.

It's flip-flop season once again.

Although a lot of people wear flip-flops year round, summer is the perfect time to whip them out and show off that great pedicure.

Twenty-three-year-old Sun Lorraine Lo decided to capitalize on this fact.

Sun was working in a hotel when she decided to quit and become a full-time graduate school student. "Finding myself with so much time and resources slowly jacked my 'I-forgot-thinking-of-what-bad-was-I-could-possibly-worries-into.'"

"I noticed how the Brazilian-made branded flip-flops are becoming fashion must-have nowadays. But it's not something everyone could afford. That's when I came up with the idea to turn the ordinary slipper into a funky and trendy fashion piece that is affordable at the same time."

Last January, she started her project.

"I started making hand-beaded flip-flops. I actually got the inspiration from [2NE1's] since I used the initials with the girl who makes proof necklaces and posters of them."

With the help of her fiancé and pen, her years, Rain took a hand-first plunge into the business. Her first clients were her relatives, friends and classmates. Then, friends of her clients started ordering, too. "I have people who buy three to five pairs at a time. They either buy it for themselves or give them away as gifts. My customers vary from teenagers to middle-aged women. It is really something for everyone."

She makes new bead designs every week, but Rain's favorite colors remain to be her pink, blue, lime green and purple flip-flops with white trim.

And while she's happy about selling, she said the cash inflow is just a perk. "The income I get from this business is just a bonus, but what really drives me to keep able to express myself creatively, and having others be interested and appreciative of my work is the best feeling."

People will undoubtedly ask the all-important question—just how comfy are Rain's flip-flops?

Hey, for comfy that store might even be wearing them soon.

"I have been getting requests to design and make beaded flip-flops for men," Rain said. "I would probably look into it soon."

The size of flip-flops is comfortable. When the last arrived at the 24/7 office for a shoot, the girls were crazy trying them on and declaring which ones they were purchasing.

"I wanted to create something that is inexpensive, unique and different so that people could not resist getting a pair."

Rain has definitely succeeded.

To get the link to Rain's online photo album, e-mail her at beadingsbyrain@yahoo.com. Call or text her at (0917) 8000522.

AQUA and green bead necklace

CANDY-COLORED quartz necklace

YELLOW and gold bead earrings

SWAROVSKI crystal necklace with butterfly quartz pendant

Awesome accessories

Text and photos by Bianca Consunji
24/7 Correspondent

KRIS Aquino and Korina Sanchez got Marianne Jose to turn her first...

"Back in college, I would watch TV and see all the artistas, especially Kris Aquino and Korina Sanchez, wearing bead accessories," Marianne says. "I thought, I could make those just like what the artistas wore, and was sure as if I'll make it myself. I went to Quiapo, bought those strands of wax quarts and made it into a necklace. That was my very first accessories."

From there, she started making various accessories, including earrings and bracelets, and is also venturing into sandals this summer. "Since I make only 2 pieces for each design, there is almost no chance of run-ending another person with the same thing," she says. "Also, I keep my stuff affordable. Nothing is over P500 ...I want to let everyone be able to buy my accessories."

Contact Marianne at 09.15-5809004.

MULTI-STRANDED fuchia bead necklace

BLACK and aqua-and-blue bead necklaces with aqua pendants

CAPIZ shell earrings with butterfly embellishment

BLUE quartz earrings

YELLOW gold and white pearl earrings, P450

CAMELEON pearl bracelet with Chinese ceramic beads, P300

BLUE ceramic bead bracelet, P250

SILVER bracelet with silver plate tubes, blue pearls and glass beads, P300

PINK and white colour chain bracelet, P450

VINTAGE looking bronze bracelet, P450

GUMPASS bronze bracelet, P350

VINTAGE looking bronze bracelet, P400

PAINTED bronze bracelet, P250

VINTAGE bronze necklace, P350

Power of two

Twenty-four-year-old Olive and Kaye set aside their difference and unite in their mission—to help Filipinos feel good about themselves

Text by Pam Pastor
Photos by Nonoy Montibola

THEY'RE very different. Twenty-four-year-old Olive Ramella is a cum laude graduate from UP Diliman with a bachelor's degree in Broadcast Communication. She's been an editor, writer, events coordinator, member, ship officer and pre-school teacher.

Kaye Lascia-Lim, also 24, graduated from UST with a bachelor's degree in Med Tech. She worked in Pfizer as an administrative officer and researcher and now she's a full-time wife and mommy.

But they do have some things in common—their love for style and fashion.

Back in 2002, they used to sell accessories through their families, friends and acquaintances. They also joined bazaars and penetrated through different organizations, but when business became slow, they decided to put a stop to it.

But when Kaye married Olive's cousin and moved in to their house, the two decided to breathe new life into their old business. "It was really a convenient and good time for us because she was technically a housewife and I was practically unemployed, and [economic] woes were getting popular again."

Thus the birth of BeMyBestie by Olive and Kaye. Their accessories are divided into four categories— Glam and Classy, Cool and Casual, Fun and Funky and Chic and Charming, to cater to the various needs of various women.

Kaye and Olive are constantly seeking growth. "We constantly study our craft by researching the accessories market—design, price, materials, marketability etc., as well as watching ourselves through beading books and magazines, and through our own experimentation."

The girls are driven by their desire to help Filipinos feel good about themselves.

"Filipinos like us express themselves through beauty, creativity and imagination. Looking good is not just about physical appearance, but more importantly about feeling good as well. Investing one's self-esteem and confidence and having the courage to face up to life's challenges as well as enjoy its blessings."

They design and create their products on their own, with their best friends Olive is passionate about experimenting with colorful beads and likes browsing unique earrings. Kaye, on the other hand, loves pearls and crystals, using them for hand-crafted bracelets.

Their bestsellers include the chandelier earrings, charm bracelets and vintage looking designs.

Right now, Olive and Kaye have been selling their products through their families, friends and the Internet, hoping they will be part of the Filipinas Cyberstall, a store which will be launched this month. They are also looking into consignment deals.

The two have a lot of plans for the future. "Currently, like other young designers, we would like to have our very own shop someday. For our more immediate goals, we plan to venture into other local products such as beaded hair accessories, bags, belts, tea straps, caps and jeans. We would also like to eventually have our own website and be able to export our products."

The future looks bright for Olive and Kaye. And why shouldn't it be? After all, two heads are better than one.

Check out their products at www.picturetrail.com/bemybestie. For orders and inquiries, call 0917.5090975 and 0922.8136722 or e-mail bemybestie@yahoo.com.

GIFT package for showcasing

Amanda's secret

Text by Katrina Yap
24/7 Correspondent
Photos by Rudy Esperas

AMANDA Nogales, a graduating Management Economics (ME) major, wanted to get an A in her business formulation and implementation class last year.

She needed to come up with a project that would make money—and earn the respect of her teachers. With her groupmates Mich Seña, Nin Andaleon, Char Tan, Iris Millan, Mesh Abella and Bobbie Peraan, Nogales came up with Naughty Undie.

Nogales says she was fine apprehensive about the idea of selling panties because most members of her group were men. She also felt embarrassed to sell her merchandise.

"But it ensured an annual big MEday pa ako to sell panties. But eventually, I grew to love the concept and commitment myself to it," she says.

Unimpressed

Selling the idea to professors, however, was not easy. The first time they had to defend their project they faced one criticism after another. The panelists were not particularly impressed, and they got a C+.

"We were humiliated and scolded. (Sir Isaac) remarks like, 'I'm not even going to let my 15 years old wear that'," Nogales recalls.

But this letdown only motivated her and her friends more determined. They knew there was a market for the underwear—the young, trendy, bikay Filipina girl who values self-expression. They stood their ground, and worked extra hard to push their sense during the business development phase of the project.

The group joined bazaars, asked friends to market their products, and did direct selling. Nogales even bought her items at the gym and sold her stuff in the women's locker room. Her customers found the items.

They also picked the right time to launch their business: it was the Christmas season, so many people bought them as gifts.

Just one of many

It wasn't easy though. Being full-time college seniors, the group was just one of many that needed to be done. "We were on hell week mode for the

THONGY and sexy

STRIPED effect

A group of graduating students' naughty project becomes a promising business

rest of the semester. And inconsistent suppliers and unkept promises certainly [did] not help our situation," Nogales says.

Looking for suppliers was the biggest obstacle they faced. According to Nogales, inconsistent suppliers would not accept their terms. The suppliers' minimum order ranged from 3,000 to 6,000 pieces but the group only had budget for 300 to 1,000 pieces.

But the group persevered and eventually found a supplier that could meet their requirements.

Hard work paid off. "We sold enough and, because of the business experience gained over the three-month implementation phase, we were able to write an in-depth paper on our strategy," Nogales says. The group received good marks from the panel, which made up for all the hardships.

Even before the school project was over, the business was not as consumer demand continued. And since Nogales and friends were still awaiting replies to their job and law school applications, they thought it best to continue the business. Besides, with classes almost over, they had more time to attend to the business.

At present, the group is still waiting for their final grade. Whether or not they get the A they were aiming for, the success of Naughty Undie seems proof enough they have indeed learned entrepreneurial lessons and business skills.

Contact Nogales at amanda1@pldtdsl.net and at 09178309402.

LEAF drop earrings, P150

WHITE and pearl necklace with pink pearls, P300

BLACK crystal and tourmaline bead earrings, P180

SILVER chain hits, P180

SILVER flower earrings with red stripes and pearl beads, P120

WHITE and pearl earrings with pink pearls, P120

WHITE grape design earrings, P100

CHINESE coin earrings, P100

RED grape design earrings, P200

PURPLE chandelier earrings with diamond charm, P180

KEYCHAIN with silver charm (P85); matching with arrow (P100)

BIG scrapbook, P150 DAGDAGPUT, skull, flowers - color your own, Honeypunk, P80

Crafty creatures

ROSARY (Inclusive), P110

BRACED (Inclusive), P200

JOURNAL, P180

Badette and Marjess Amor are sisters who thrive on crafts and accessories

Text by Katrina Tuz
INLY Correspondent
Photos by Joseph Agcaoli

A FIFTH working in the advertising industry for six years, 29-year-old Badette Amor decided to go back during her first love—crafts.

Badette and her elder sister, Marjess, have always had a knack for crafts. When they were younger, they made notepads and handed memorandum as gifts for friends or for personal use.

But with a little help from their mom, word of mouth turned a hobby into a lucrative business. And thus, the birth of Artsy Creatures.

Artsy Creatures was only a few months old when it got its first big break. The Sun Palawan Resort in Palawan loved its notepads and made a big order in 2003.

"We just sent them on e-mail and asking if they'd be interested, and they were," Badette says. "But this bulk order taught them the ropes of the business.

Badette describes the experience, "I underestimated the production time." With the deadline fast approaching, they had to enlist every family member to pitch in. "Everyone had to help out...my mom, even my sister's (Marjess') mother-in-law who was visiting from Davao during that time. My dad would pack up the notepads. Then my (younger) sister Joyce would also help," Badette recounts.

A year later, Badette and Marjess started doing the banner rounds, expanding their offerings to scrapbooks, journals, beaded key chains, bookmarks and tassels bracelets. It was then the sisters realized they really had a market for their items—teenage girls.

Badette recalls a particular customer who kept the compliments flowing. "She was like, 'Oh my gosh, I love your stuff! They're so cute!'"

Bazaar darling

It was the bazaars that also brought in the big bucks. With transactions averaging at P3,000 per person, their earnings from just one bazaar reached six figures.

"And to think we only started with P5,000!" Badette says.

Instead calling at the bazaars are the journals, beaded bookmarks and key chains. The popular are embellished with beads, shells, bamboo leaves, ribbon and paper accents. The bookmarks and key rings mean, while are decorated with beads, crystals, pearls, semi-precious stones and silver charms.

But the other items get their share of the attention, too. According to Badette, the scrapbooks and the coasters appeal to the older age bracket.

Badette is particularly ecstatic about the coasters, which are made of crystals, rhinestone pearls, semi-precious stones and beads. She says she usually gets inquiries on them for weddings souvenirs.

Interesting to note here is that latter at a customer in Boutique made the coasters. Badette says, after all, they are the unchanging when it comes to coasters. The items are so meticulous, they check every bead for damage, she says.

It sure has well—she is just as scrupulous. She and Marjess still create everything else by hand, as she is able to spot if something doesn't flow up to her standards.

"It's hard though. There are just times you feel like giving up," she says. "Last Christmas, Marjess and I hardly slept just to fulfill my order." She says there may be a need to outsource all her people to work for them.

Badette is indeed very busy, but she knows she owns a part of growing the business. She doesn't want to rush. "I want to take it a step at a time," Badette says. She should. Her business is just two years old and already doing well.

Check out Artsy Creations at www.artsycreations.ph or e-mail artsycreations@yahoo.com

BOOKMARK, P50

BOOKMARK, P50

BOOKMARK, P50

PENDANT (necklace), P125

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'Kikay' and proud of it

Text by Maui V. Reyes
Zhel Correspondent
Photos by Kelly Lerma

EVER found yourself lusting over items that you just can't afford? While some choose to save up for them, Bianca Abad decided to actually make them.

Tired of asking her mother for more pocket money to go shopping, Bianca enlisted the aid of her aunt who was familiar with the ropes of accessory-making.

From wallets to bracelets to bags and bracelets, Bianca launched her own online catalog (check it out at http://princessbiancasbicol.multiply.com/market) where she sells her own handmade items as well as fair finds.

Inspired by "other young entrepreneurs who really started from scratch, from their own hard-earn, too, and eventually started making money from it," Bianca dreams of going to Hong Kong's famed night market one day to hunt for treasures "to assemble Kikay products."

To get a hold of Bianca's products, check out her website or e-mail Acheveneer_26@yahoo.com. She can also be reached at 09122670320.

SCARVES in different colors, P150

By Maui V. Reyes
Zhel Correspondent

I LOVE Christmas lights, but not during the Christmas season," Bianca Cruz shares. "Candles are passé, and Boracay lamps are tacky." Her solution? Bitnya lamps! Made of chalk for Christmas lights to string through, a Bianca lamp easily adds pizzazz to any home.

Cruz confesses that before nailing her first lamp, she didn't know how to operate a sewing machine. "But seeing the finished product gave me a tangible sense of accomplishment that my two mentors (helpers didn't. Until time I sold one, I felt appreciated in a way that my selling arena could not feel," she says.

Bitnya, which means "imagination" in Tagalog, is Cruz's inspiration. It's also the name of her one-year-old son, whose education she's saving up for.

Bitnya lamps are P75 each. They also make gorgeous incense holders (P60), and beautiful stencils (six sets, the cheapest is P300). To order, text or call 0922-8035889 or e-mail bitnyalamps@yahoo.com. Some of their items are also carried by Tahona, located at the corner of Lizada and Bitnya in Manila.